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THE LAIRD O' COCKPEN



BY

"RITA"

AUTHOR OF

"SHEBA," "COUNTESS DAPHNE," "A VAGABOND LOVER," ETC

[Mrs. E. M. J. van Booth.]

Authorized Edition

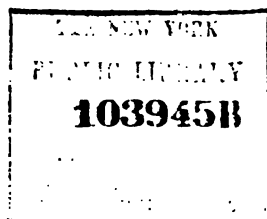
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THE LAIRD O' COCKPEN.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

"LOOKING BACK."

* Comfort—comfort scorned of devils,
This is truth, the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow
Is remembering happier things !"

"Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,
The hills of the Highlands for ever I love."

"JEAN, have ye taken the bit lassie up her cup o' milk ?"

"Deed no, mem, it hae just sleepit my memory, but I'll e'en go wi' it at once. I doubt if the bairn's wakin' though, she was ower tired the nicht."

The voices roused me and I sprang up from bed and went over to the window. It looked out on a small yard, and there stood Jean the old Scotch servant whose voice I had heard. She was talking to Grannie, who was in the kitchen. I threw open the window and let the sweet June air into the quaint little room which I had only seen as yet by candlelight.

The noise of the opening window attracted Jean's attention. She looked up and saw me. A look of alarm crossed her face—wrinkled and brown as a crab-apple.

"Are ye daft, lassie, to be standing there wi' no covering save yon bit linen stuff? Back to bed wi' ye this minnit. We've no wish to hae ye sick on our hands, and a nice character ye brought too. Aye, but the mistress is gangin' to ye the noo, and siccan a scolding as she can give! But I'm just thinking ye'll be the better o' it."

I retreated hastily—taking a flying leap back into the little white draped bed, which I had scarcely reached when the door opened to admit Grannie.

Our acquaintance had been short—but short as it was I think I laughed in my sleeves at the bare idea of receiving a scolding or anything approaching it from the lips of that sweet-faced, gentle, old creature. My father was her eldest son, and I was his only child. He had sent me on a visit to her for two reasons, one, that I was in very delicate health and the doctors had recommended Scotland, the other, that he had recently married again—a proceeding to which I had strongly objected, having even more than that proverbial dislike to a stepmother which the only daughters of widowed fathers are supposed to possess.

“And how is my bairn this morning?” said Grannie, as she came towards me with the glass of warm milk in her hand that she had declared to be necessary for my health while I remained under her roof.

“I am quite well, and not a bit tired,” I said, kissing the dear old kindly face bent down in anxious tenderness to mine.

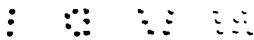
“That is good to hear, dearie. Now drink this, and then you may get up and dress. We’ll soon put some colour in those white cheeks, ye poor wee mite. Why your cousin Nannie—who’s a bit bairn of ten years old—would make two o’ ye. And how old is it you are, seventeen—eighteen——?”

“Seventeen, Grannie, and three months.”

“And nae much to show for it, dearie,” she said, smiling. “What will ye look like beside our bouncing Scotch lassies, and your ain cousins, the Camerons, among them. Some of them are sure to be here the morn—they were so anxious to see you. Indeed they wished to be here last night to welcome you, but I said no. I knew you would be tired after the long journey from the south.”

She smoothed my hair and kissed me again. I thought I had never heard anything so sweet as this slow, soft speech of hers, with its measured accents and occasional use of Scotch expressions and phrases which were as yet unfamiliar to my English ears.

Ah! how dear and how well-remembered that accent *and those expressions* were destined to become to me!



I should like to have detained her there for long. It was new to me to be caressed and petted and made much of, and I possessed a nature which had an absolute craving for love. Not a very safe nature I fear—and one apt to be jealous as well as exacting. A nature that could not but lead to suffering and sorrow in the future, being far less capable of enjoyment than of suspicion, of analysis than of acceptance. But at the present moment my whole heart went out in a flood of tenderness and delight to this grave-eyed, sweet-faced, old Scotch lady, with her gentle dignity, her kindly grace of manner, her fond protecting air of possession and regard, the like of which I had never met before.

My heart had gone out to her from the moment I saw her face and heard her sweet voice, and warm and kindly welcome. I was "her bairn" from that hour. Something for her to love, and cherish, and protect, and care for. A new interest in her life, so she told me, even as she was a wonder and delight to me.

Oh, Grannie, Grannie, I look back on all that happy time of my youth—I, a saddened, sorrowing woman now—I look back and wonder what you would say if you knew what your "bairn" had suffered. I look back and I think of all your gentle words and kindly counsels, and sometimes, in the long dark hours of sleepless nights, I hear your voice again. How it warned me, how it counselled me, and I, in youth's headstrong fashion, would only laugh and jest.

I do not laugh now, Grannie, but you cannot know that, for between "your bairn" and you is the gulf of a great mysterious silence—set it seems to me for ever—the silence of the grave, Grannie—that we cannot bridge, though our hearts should break for sign or word of each other.

* * * * *

Poor old tear-stained book—the journal of those days in my Highland home, and among the dearest, kindest folk it has ever been my lot to meet! How strange it seems to me to read these pages, and the history they record. How strange to remember what I was, and think of what I have become!

I opened that journal with a heart as pure, a life as stainless, as its own pages. I think now, as I look on

them with a woman's eyes, that the marred irregular lines, and the tears that have stained them, are no unfitting representative of that life's after history.

Grannie soon left me on this special morning—the morning after my arrival at Craig Bank, as her little house was called. It was but a small place on the outskirts of Inverness, but to me it seemed a paradise of loveliness, with its quaint old-fashioned garden, full of fruit trees, and roses, and strawberry beds, and useful kitchen stuff, all mingled together in a fashion that would have horrified an orthodox gardener.

I made my toilet rapidly, and ran downstairs to the parlour, where breakfast was laid and waiting. The supply of hot scones, and fish, and fancy bread, and marmalade, the thick cream and delicious butter, astonished my English tastes, used only to the inevitable fried bacon and watery milk of a London lodging house. I made a meal that astonished myself, though Granny lamented my poor appetite, and was perpetually comparing it with that of "Nannie," the ten-year-old lassie of whom she had spoken before.

I began to feel some curiosity about these cousins. There were a great many of them—ten altogether, I had heard—the eldest being a son some twenty years old, then five daughters, then two more sons, and finally the redoubtable "Nannie" and a small sister of eight, who completed the family. Grannie assured me they would be round soon after breakfast—some of them at least—and I awaited their advent in the garden while she went about her household duties.

I had not been there very long when the sound of voices reached me, and old Jean appeared to summon me into the house.

I followed her into the little parlour as they called it, and my first impression was that it was filled to overflowing with a feminine crowd of all ages and sizes.

There was my Aunt Margaret to begin with, who gave me a most affectionate welcome, then the eldest daughter, Flora, aged nineteen, a fair-haired, handsome girl, who seemed inclined to be patronizing. Then a dark-haired, rosy-cheeked damsel, who seemed brimming *over with fun* and laughter, as if life had never ceased *to be one huge joke* to her; this was Bella, to whom

my heart went out as spontaneously as her own greeting. The others, Maggie, Jessie, Rosa and Nannie, were grouped together in my memory as parts of a whole with no very distinguishing characteristics.

I felt a little shy and awkward at first, more especially as I had to undergo a fire of questions and personal remarks as to which side of the family I "favoured."

However, as they unanimously agreed, it was the Scotch side and not the English, I was received with general approbation. My Aunt Margaret was very kind. She resembled my father, and was his favourite sister she informed me. She was rather inclined to pity me as a poor, weak, sickly offshoot of a very healthy and well-favoured line, but I took the compassion very indifferently. I knew very little of the family, or the "lang pedigree" on which they prided themselves, and which ran back to the days of the Bruce. But I thought them all very frank and kind, and I liked that slow, soft drawl in their speech, and the faint Scotch accent, which was so apparent, yet which none of them imagined they possessed.

After a while Grannie suggested that some of them should take me off and show me what the town was like, which Flora and Bella eagerly agreed to do. My aunt then insisted that I should come back with them for some lunch or "piece" as she called it, and be introduced to my Uncle Jamie and the eldest son Kenneth; so all this being duly arranged, I ran upstairs for my hat, and in a few moments was walking along to Union Street between my two cousins, feeling smaller and more insignificant than ever beside two such tall and well-developed specimens of young womanhood.

CHAPTER II.

TAKEN INTO CONFIDENCE.

"The Laird o' Cockpen he's proud and he's great;
His mind is ta'en up wi' the things o' the State;
He wanted a wife his braw house to keep,
But favour wi' wooin' was fashious to seek."

—*Old Song.*

I AM afraid I was not so much impressed by the beauty of the town as my cousins expected. To a girl who had seen London and Paris, and most of the great

continental cities, the little capital of the Highlands as it appeared twenty years ago was not very imposing.

I liked the ancient part of the town best, and the view from the Castle delighted me, as did also the graceful Gothic beauty of the cathedral.

Bella pointed out Craig-Phadric, and the singularly shaped hill of Tom-na-hurich, which was laid out as a cemetery, and where she suggested they should take me next day if I was strong enough for the walk.

"You are very delicate, are you not?" she asked. "Grannie said so; you certainly are the wee-est creature I ever saw. Are you really seventeen?"

"Indeed I am," I said. "Don't I look it?"

She laughed. "You look about ten," she said. "Who ever saw such hands and feet? You're not much taller than our Nannie."

"Oh, that's what Granny is always saying," I answered pettishly. "I don't know why I should be compared with a child like Nannie. Why I'm quite grown up."

"What a pettish wee creature it is," laughed Bella. "You've been spoilt, Miss, I make no doubt. Being Uncle Jock's only child——"

"Indeed," I interrupted, "I have not been spoilt, far from it. My life has been very lonely, and I have always had the feeling that I never was wanted by anyone."

The two girls looked at me somewhat curiously.

"Oh, that's not possible," they said in a joint chorus of disbelief.

"Surely Uncle Jock was fond of you," added Bella.

"Why do you call him that?" I asked. "It's not his name."

"Grannie and mother always called him so," said Flora, "and everyone who knew him as a boy does the same."

"Here comes Alick Macpherson," said Bella suddenly.

She looked at me with a mischievous gleam in her dark eyes. "Look how Flora is blushing," she whispered. "He's her beau."

I surveyed the approaching youth with some curiosity. He was tall, fair, ruddy, like most Scotch youths, and had a somewhat awkward manner. He came up to my *cousins* and shook hands with them, remarking that the *day was "verra warm."* His accent was very pro-

nounced ; he had not long left the University of Glasgow, where he had been studying for the medical profession.

They addressed him as "Alick," though he called them Miss Cameron and Miss Bella most scrupulously. When I was introduced to him he favoured me with a somewhat curious stare, and then shook hands. I mentally pronounced him "uncouth," but he was a good-hearted, kindly young fellow, and I grew to like him very much as I knew him better. The two girls chatted away very frankly with him. I remained silent, drinking in draughts of the pure, sweet air, and watching the effects of sun and shadow on the Ness.

My attention was at last drawn to the conversation by hearing myself addressed.

I turned and met the blue eyes of young Macpherson fixed on me.

"I was just saying, Miss Lindsay, that I know my mother and sister would be so pleased to know you. Could you not join your cousins to-morrow night ? They are coming to drink tea with us."

"I should be very pleased," I said. "But I am staying with my grandmother at Craig Bank, and I'm not sure if she would be willing to spare me, or have made any other plans."

"Oh, I'll walk round to Craig Bank and ask her," he said cheerfully. "She'll no mind. She and I are auld friends, you know."

I did not know, but I was content to take his word for it, and to be drawn into the conversation by degrees, though it concerned people and places about whom I was very ignorant.

Alick Macpherson seemed to know everyone in or about Inverness, and he planned a number of walks and excursions for us if the fine weather should last. As my curiosity had been aroused by Bella's whisper, I watched him and Flora with great interest.

Lovers and sweethearts were to me an unknown species. My only acquaintance with them I owed to books. I cannot say that either Flora or Alick behaved according to my pre-conceived notions. They seemed singularly cool and commonplace.

Presently Bella suggested I should walk round the *Castle with her*, and she would show me her father's office.

"They'll be having something to say to one another," she remarked, as she slipped my arm in hers.

"Are they really in love?" I asked, deeply interested. "He looks very—young—does he not?"

"He is two-and-twenty," said Bella. "As for being in love—well—that I can't well say. He has always dangled after Flora, and he dances with her more than with any other girl and takes her for walks to the Islands. We always look upon that as a sign of 'intentions' here. You must see the Islands; they're just a grand place for sweethearts."

"And is he Flora's only sweetheart?" I asked.

"Well, I wouldn't be too sure of that," answered Bella. "She's rather a bit of a flirt, in a quiet way, and she's very much admired in Inverness. She went to the Northern Meetings Ball last year and she was quite the belle of the evening."

"Did you go also?"

"Oh, no; I don't care for dancing. I'm just a 'housewife' as father says. I have quite enough to do looking after the children and their clothes and one thing and another. I can't spare time for balls and parties; when Flora's married it will be time enough to think of myself."

She went on to tell me then of family anxieties, of her mother's delicate health, and the children's various requirements, of the difficulty of balancing a small income with the ever increasing expenses of a large family, and she left me with a very sincere admiration for the genuine unselfishness and good temper with which she had chosen to take this burden on her own shoulders.

That honest, frank sympathy induced as frank a response on my part, and I told her all about myself. How strange and wandering a life I had led—how unhappy I had been in my lonely, unheeded childhood—how my father's second marriage had seemed to estrange us more than ever, and finally how my health had broken down and the doctors had advised him to send me to Scotland for six months to try the effect of my native air as a last resource, when tonics and cod-liver oil had failed to benefit me.

"Oh, we will soon alter all that," said Bella cheerfully.

"*You want plenty of fresh air and good milk and porridge, that's the stuff for you, I'm sure. Why, you're so*

slight, I should be afraid to trust you in a gale of wind. You'd be blown into the Canal. And do you ever have any colour? You look like a white rose beside us all."

"That is very poetical," I said, laughing. "But I am too dark for the simile. I am more like a yellow rose if it comes to that."

"You are a very pretty rose," she said frankly, "and I expect you'll be turning the heads of half the young men in the town, before you've been here a month."

I surveyed her in genuine astonishment.

"My dear Bella," I exclaimed. "Pretty!—I—what *are* you talking of? Why, if there's one thing that has been dinned into my ears from the time I can remember, it is that I am hopelessly ugly, small, sallow, thin—why, I haven't a good point about me."

"We'll soon see about that," laughed Bella. "Of course, I'm not meaning that you're very extraordinarily good-looking at present, but anyone could see what you would be once you got colour and plumpness."

"Well, please don't discuss my appearance," I said, "it makes me feel uncomfortable. Tell me some more about Flora and yourself."

"About myself there's not much to tell. You know, in a big family like ours, there's generally one to pipe while the others dance. Flora is different. She is very clever and, as everyone says, very pretty. I've no talents, and nothing but a knack of housewifery and managing to make me of any special use. But I like it. I couldn't play the piano, or dance, or do anything like Flora does, but I'm a very good cook," she added, laughing, "and I can keep the whole house going with only one servant, and that's no easy matter."

"What a good wife you will make," I exclaimed with involuntary admiration.

"I, oh, no!" and she laughed merrily. "I am going to be an old maid, my dear; I'm just cut out for it; they will always tell you that at home."

"Perhaps," I said, "they only say so in order to keep you with them. If I were a man——"

"Well?" and the merry eyes looked down at mine and the bright smile flashed its light and warmth over the kindly face.

"I'm very sure," I said emphatically, "that you

would *not* be left an 'old maid'; I'd give you no peace till you married me."

"You funny wee thing! I do believe you mean it. Well, I'll e'en take you for a sweetheart, little coz; I'm sure there's a big heart in that small body. Why, now, what about pale cheeks and white roses; there's a fine colour! I wish you could see yourself—and, as I live, here comes Kenneth and my father. Look, just leaving the Castle there. We'll go and meet them."

I glanced in the direction indicated and saw two figures approaching. One was that of a tall, grey-haired man, with a florid complexion and the same laughing, merry eyes as Bella possessed. The other, younger of the two, was a grave, stern-looking young man, of whom I felt somewhat in awe.

With Uncle Jamie I was friends at once; with the grave and solemn Kenneth, I felt instinctively that friendship or familiarity would be a work of time. They loitered on the Castle hill talking to me until Bella announced it was time for lunch, then we parted company and, escorted by the devoted Alick Macpherson, took our way through the little town to the Macgregors' house.

My aunt had returned, and we sat down to a substantial luncheon, and more cousins came on the scene, and I found myself taken quite warmly and naturally into the circle and getting as noisy and merry as themselves.

Alick Macpherson had gone on his errand to Craig Bank, and returned soon after luncheon was over to proclaim that he had won consent for my appearance at his mother's that evening.

Later on, Bella walked back with me to Grannie's to help me in the important task of selecting a dress for the occasion, and to assure the old lady that I would be well taken care of and escorted home in good time.

"The bairn looks better already! She wants young life about her," said Grannie, regarding me affectionately. "But you must take care and not over-tire her, Bella; she's but a fragile thing in comparison with you lassies, and I've made my mind up that I'll send her back south looking as bright and bonny as any o' ye—so please the Lord."

Then we went upstairs, and I had to display my not very sumptuous wardrobe to Bella, who decided that

the most suitable dress for me was a plain cream-coloured serge with collar and cuffs of dark blue velvet.

"We don't do much fine dressing here," she said, "and, indeed, I'm not sure but that's too grand; however, you'll look very bonnie, and I'm proud to show you to the Macphersons as our cousin from London."

I looked at myself in the glass over the toilet-table and shook my head dubiously.

"Not much to be proud of, Bella," I said, and, indeed, beside that glowing, healthful face and tall, full figure I looked very pale, very small, very insignificant.

"We'll see, my dear, we'll see," she answered, kissing me in a sudden impulsive fashion that moved me to throw my arms round her and cling to her in as sudden an impulse of love and longing.

"Oh, Bella," I half sobbed, "love me a little; be good to me. I have been so lonely always—always——"

"Poor wee creature," she murmured again and again, stroking the wild dark hair back from my forehead. "Don't fret for that, you'll win love enough here, I can tell you. Too much, perhaps; wait till you see the laddies to-night. I'm going just out of pure curiosity to see how they'll take to you; you're just like a wee fairy among all of us great lassies. What a pity we grow so big; it's the porridge, I'm thinking."

"Bella," I said, suddenly withdrawing from her arms, "I want you to do something for me."

"Well, dearie?"

"Will you teach me some Scotch songs? I can sing. They say my voice is very good, but I should like to learn some Scotch songs and how to pronounce them."

"Oh, you must ask Flora that, my dear," she said, "I told you I had no accomplishments, and no talents—except for cooking. But, Flora, she's a fair musician, and I'm sure she'd teach you with pleasure. For the matter o' that, Grannie would do it—she's fine at the Scotch music and used to have the sweetest voice possible. Even now we lassies try to get her to sing to us whenever we're here of an evening. You ask her to sing you 'The Laird o' Cockpen' or 'The Land o' the Leal.' You'll never hear the like o' it again."

"By the way" she added suddenly, "I wonder will *he* be at the Macphersons' to-night?"

"He!—who?" I asked wonderingly.

"The 'Laird o' Cockpen' as we call him," she said, laughing gaily. "He's just the laird o' the song to the life. 'He's gude and he's great', and his mind is certainly taken up with things 'o' the State' for he's a great politician, and very good and very charitable, and a great pillar of the Free Kirk. More than all, he wants a 'braw wifie,' and many's the lass that's set her cap at him, but he's not just easy to please, and he's not so young as to be secured easily by just a pretty face and no more. Now, wee coz, suppose he took a fancy to you—my! but that *would* be a fine thing. He's rich, he has a beautiful place called Corriemoor, and he'd make an excellent husband I'm sure——"

"Oh, Bella! Bella!" I cried, laughing, "how you do run on. I don't want to get married. I hate the idea. I've never even had a sweetheart, like you and Flora. I don't think I like men—at least, no man I've ever seen yet."

"Listen to the bit creature," cried Bella, laughing heartily, "and she but seventeen! What could you know about men, dearie? I should be sorry if you did too. There's nothing takes the youth and innocence from a girl so quickly as what they call flirtation. But there, I must be going now. I'm sure I shall find nothing right at home, for I've been gadding about the whole day. We'll come to fetch you at five o'clock to go to the Macphersons'. I hope you won't be tired. But it's not so much of a walk. It's a bonnie place, theirs, just out of the town. And as for liking them—well, Mrs. Macpherson is just the kindest, sweetest body in the world. Everyone loves her. Alick is her only son. He's going to be a doctor, but he'll have all her money one day. She had five children and they're all dead. She just worships Alick, and he's not a bad sort of lad, taking him altogether."

"And does he 'just worship' Flora?" I asked, laughing. "How Scotch you are sometimes, Bella?"

"I'll make you Scotch too, my saucy coz, before I've had you long with me," she answered. "You'll soon give up mincing your words in that affected Southern fashion."

"*It's not a bit affected,*" I said indignantly.

"*Ah! now you look fine,*" she said with a wicked gleam in her mischievous eyes. "I wish the Laird could see you!"

"THE LAIRD."

CHAPTER III.

"THE LAIRD."

"On his head a bonnet blue,
Bonnie laddie—Highland laddie,
Tartan plaid and Highland trew,
Bonnie laddie—Highland laddie."

THE Macphersons' house was a very pretty one. The drawing-room had a large bay window looking out on the garden, with its tangled masses of roses and bright flower-beds shaded by ash, and larch, and elder trees.

We were the first arrivals, but the room soon filled, and Mrs. Macpherson, a gay and lively old lady with a smile and a joke for ever on her lips, introduced me to a variety of Scotch youth and maidenhood, whose one striking characteristic appeared to be that of exuberant health and spirits.

Tea was soon announced. Such a tea!

No mere thin wafers of bread and butter here, but piles of scones and toast, and rich cakes, and cream, and fruit, and every variety of preserves, and cold spiced meats for those who liked substantial dishes. And how they ate, those Scotch youths and maidens, and how thoroughly they seemed to enjoy themselves.

When the meal was over we all roamed about the garden and Bella joined me and piloted me about, and explained who was who, and a great deal about pedigrees and "forbears," which I must confess did not interest me in the very least.

We were standing in a part of the garden that commanded a view of the river over the low briar-hedge, when I heard the click of the gate and looked round to see who was coming. A tall figure appeared, turning the corner of the gravelled walk, and seeing us, lifted the "bonnet" from a head of chestnut curls, and came forward to greet Bella.

I stood quite still, watching him as he approached. I thought I had never seen so handsome a face and figure.

"It's Douglas Hay," whispered Bella. "I wonder at Mrs. Macpherson asking him here."

I wondered greatly what objection there could be to

his presence, but as he was close at hand I had to control my curiosity.

He shook hands with Bella, and I thought her strangely stiff and cold in her greeting. Then his blue eyes turned to me so frankly and questioningly that Bella could not but give the introduction they asked for. As for myself, the "fine colour" she had lauded before made itself felt in my hot cheeks and a strange shyness and embarrassment came over me.

But the frank, gay, cordial manner had an irresistible charm, and even Bella soon forgot her coldness and stiffness as the new comer rattled on, giving a host of excuses for his late appearance.

"I went for a bathe in the Canal with the Frasers," he said, "and had no idea it was so late."

"Well, you've missed your tea," said Bella, "unless Mrs. Macpherson is inclined to give you some all to yourself."

"I suppose I must go and make my apologies," he said, looking somewhat ruefully at my cousin's face. "I wish you would come too," he added.

His eyes met mine. I smiled involuntarily. His manner was so boyish, but he looked a great deal older than Alick Macpherson.

"Do you think we shall get you into favour?" asked Bella. "You know very well you can always get the right side of Mrs. Macpherson if you wish."

"Not always, she is partial to punctuality. However, I won't be in bad company, for I met the Laird as I was coming along, and I'm sure he's on his way also. Only that he was too dignified to run, we'd have arrived together."

"The Laird. Then he is coming!" exclaimed Bella eagerly.

"Gae tell Mistress Jean to come speedily ben," quoted Douglas Hay with a gay laugh. "Yes, Miss Bella, I'm almost sure he's coming here. He was in great feather. More solemn and imposing even than usual. I hope you young ladies will duly appreciate the honour."

"You seldom have a good word to say of the Laird, Douglas," said Bella quietly.

I wondered at her using his Christian name, it *savoured of acquaintance and familiarity which neither manner nor words had led me to expect.*

The young fellow shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, as for that," he said indifferently, "he's no whit kinder to me than I to him." Then he laughed softly. "I'm thinking, Miss Bella," he said, "that he'll need a clothes-brush when he comes in. He met with a bit accident on the high road—just a stick or something that tripped him up. As I passed he was shaking off the dust to an accompaniment that did *not* sound—quite—like the Psalms of David."

"That's some of your mischief, I suppose," said Bella, glancing at his demure face. "What a boy you are still, Douglas—always at pranks. I never saw the like."

"It's—well it's something in the air, I'm thinking," he said, with sudden gravity. "You're all such good folk here and so solemn and so righteous. It's just terrible. Everything that's fun and sport seems to be looked on as a sin. But you're not to be giving a bad character of me to your cousin," he added suddenly; "that would not be fair; Miss Lindsay, you must promise not to believe everything you hear of me, and you're bound to hear a good deal. Inverness is just a fine place for gossip."

"People should not give cause for gossip," said Bella severely.

He laughed.

"Then they'd make it," he said. "I've no patience with narrow-minded, canting hypocrites, who put the worst construction on everything and imagine you're marching straight to perdition if you don't walk in the everyday beaten track laid down by custom."

"Well you never did that," said Bella.

His eyes flashed.

"Nor ever intend to," he said. "Life is something more to me than a road to a churchyard—at least I'll pipe and dance as I go along; if others choose to groan, let them."

"You'll have to go to the churchyard all the same," said Bella.

"Oh, no doubt; but this is very melancholy conversation with which to entertain your cousin. Miss Lindsay, is this your first visit to Scotland?"

"Yes," I said, "and I only arrived last night, so I cannot say much about it."

"I should like to hear your opinion of a Scotch Sabbath," he said, with a mischievous glance at Bella. "They have no Sunday here, you know. Why one word is better than another to express the same thing I never could understand. You'll go to the Presbyterian, I suppose? If you do I declare I'll be there to watch the effect."

I glanced at Bella. She was looking really annoyed.

"If you're a heathen yourself you needn't try and set other people against their duties," she said crossly, "and I'm not sure that we won't go to the Cathedral next Sunday, so you needn't be troubling to follow us; I daresay my cousin would like that service best."

"No, I want to go to the Presbyterian," I said.

"Do," urged Douglas Hay, looking at me with the very demon of mischief laughing out of his blue eyes; "and if old Gillespie is only half as eloquent in his discourse as he was on the last occasion I had the pleasure of hearing him—well, you'll be hard to please, that's all. Miss Bella, it's no use your frowning. Shall I ever forget that peroration with which he wound up a discourse of one hour and a quarter on the text, 'And the Sun stood still'? Here it is for you, Miss Lindsay—'And oh, brethren, is not the world full of motion, and is not every living thing a proof of motion, and in the human frame have we not the motion of the arm and the motion of the foot, the motion of the eye and the motion of the lip? and are not the rolling spheres in motion, and the waves of the sea and the leaves that the wind stirs in its flight? But brethren, take all these motions, and every other that the brain of man can conceive, and tell me is there one grander and more magnificent than that miracle of motion in my text, "And the Sun stood still!"'"

Bella could not help laughing at the tragic face and voice, and I followed her example most heartily. We were now at the entrance, and as we walked into the hall together, still laughing over Douglas Hay's piece of mimicry, we suddenly faced a gentleman coming out of the dining-room.

He recognised Bella and favoured her with a stiff bow, *then, ignoring Douglas Hay's presence and overlooking mine altogether, he walked in stately fashion into the*

dining-room, whence proceeded the sound of tea-cups and Mrs. Macpherson's cheery voice.

Bella pressed my arm.

"There," she said, "that's the Laird. Come in and be introduced to him."

CHAPTER IV.

"DOUGLAS."

"He's comin' frae the North,
That's to fancy me;
He's comin' frae the North,
That's to fancy me;
A feather in his bonnet and a ribbon at his knee,
He's a bonnie Highland laddie, and you be na he."

"Oh, Douglas, Douglas!" cried Mrs. Macpherson reproachfully, as we entered the dining-room, "when will ye learn to keep time, you graceless callant! Did I no tell you six o'clock?"

"Indeed, Mrs. Macpherson, I am very sorry. I went for a swim, and the time passed quicker than I thought possible. Please forgive me. It's mine is the loss, you know."

"Well, sit ye down—sit ye down. You shall have a cup o' tea, though you don't deserve it. Ah, Bella, my dear, just come and help me; and Miss Lindsay, will you sit here? I'm not sure are ye acquainted wi' Mr. Campbell. Mr. Campbell this is Miss Athole Lindsay, grand-daughter of Mrs. Lindsay of Craig Bank. She's just frae London, and this is her first visit to her Scotch kinsfolk and friends. We must try and make it a pleasant one."

The Laird rose and bowed solemnly to me, but he said nothing. I glanced with some curiosity at his grave face and ruddy hair, and speculated as to what his age might be. Anything from thirty to fifty I should have said.

He seemed a particularly reticent individual—drinking his tea and eating buttered scones in a solemn and sedate manner, as if weighing in his own mind their relative merits and possible consequences.

Meanwhile Douglas Hay rattled on in a jesting, nonsensical fashion peculiarly his own. I think the presence of the solemn Laird prompted him to be more audacious than he would have been with us alone. He seemed to

take a malicious pleasure in saying the most dreadful things, treating neither persons, places, nor things with any sort of respect. And yet what an irresistible manner he had. Who could be angry or offended while those blue eyes flashed defiance and the handsome mouth laughed so gaily under the shade of the brown mous-tache?

He drew Mrs. Macpherson and myself fairly into the net of his fascination. That mixture of audacity, coolness and fun was to me simply irresistible. I had never met anyone like him, and as the evening wore on and he danced and sang, and played reels for us, and performed conjuring tricks, and in every way proved himself the life and soul of the party besides being out and away the very handsomest of the men present, I could not but acknowledge that I had never met with anyone so delightful—and that the Laird might well frown and look wrathfully at a rival before whom all his own more solid advantages sank into the background.

He taught me the reel, and heartily I enjoyed that merry and inspiring dance. Then he waltzed as no one there could waltz, and, finding our steps were exactly suited, claimed me again and again on that ground.

Bella looked gravely disapproving, but I was too thoroughly enjoying myself to care about that. I seemed to catch the infection of Douglas Hay's wild spirits. The blood danced in my veins—laugh and jest responded readily to his own. I was but seventeen, and had only known a childhood and youth of repression and loneliness. Something altogether new and strange to myself awoke in me on this night—a sense of power—a capacity for enjoyment—a delight in the new sense of life and youth. I never before and perhaps never—quite—again felt as I felt then. I did not know or question why. I did not even want to analyse the cause of feelings so altogether new and strange, or pause to question the reason of so sudden and subtle a sympathy between two natures that were apparently so dissimilar.

I conjugated the verb "To enjoy" in its every mood and tense that night, and perhaps the strongest and sweetest of the many emotions I underwent was in the moment before parting, when we all stood in the hall, *cloaked and hooded*, and awaiting attendant cavaliers.

The door of the drawing-room was open and Douglas

Hay was seated at the piano. Suddenly he struck a few chords, and then his rich full voice broke out into the pathetic strain of "Auld Robin Gray."

A hush of silence fell on the chattering group. As for me I listened as one entranced to the sweet sad air and the sad and simple words. I felt the tears well up into my eyes. A great longing, and a strange pain and weariness, seemed to fill my heart. It was the story of so many lives. It sounded so mournful to-night from those gay and jesting lips. I wondered how he could sing like that—if the feeling he put into the words was forced and artificial. It seemed impossible that it could be so, there was such a *real* ring of tenderness and regret in the beautiful voice. Then the song ceased—the singer rose abruptly and closed the piano.

"Are you all ready? I hope I've not been keeping you," he said.

His eyes fell on me. I forgot the tears that were in my own. In some inexplicable way he seemed to be near me, his hand on mine, his voice at my ear. Only two words that swept by me like the breath of a sigh as he passed on to the open door. "Thank you."

Then there came the noise and bustle of parting, kisses and handshakes to Mrs. Macpherson, and I found myself with the solemn-faced Laird, who, to my unfeigned amazement, proclaimed his intention of taking me home to Craig Bank after we had parted with my cousins at their own door.

I had grown very quiet, and was feeling somewhat tired before we reached Grannie's house. My companion spoke but little, and I made no effort to encourage any communicativeness on his part. My mind was full of Douglas Hay — of that look in his eyes which had so suddenly revealed to me a depth of feeling, a possibility of earnestness, a fund of sentiment, with which I had not been inclined to credit him.

Ah! it is only after a long fight on the world's battle-field, after many deep and bitter draughts from the cup of experience, that we learn to read below the surface of human nature, and not to accept men and women as they *seem*. How keen a capacity for suffering those bright natures sometimes veil beneath that *sunny brightness*. How near the tears lie some-

times to smiling eyes that fain would have us believe tears are unknown. What mask of suffering equals that bitter one of "face-joy," which sooner or later we all learn to wear, formed, as has been rightly said by the sweetest woman poet that Fame has given us, "of pain long nourished and rounded to despair."

* * * * *

I found Grannie sitting up for me and eager to hear all about the experiences of the evening.

She came up to my bed-room and helped me to undress, and insisted on brushing out my hair while I talked. I noticed she looked grave when I spoke of Douglas Hay.

"I just wonder at Mrs. Macpherson," she said. "He's no a safe sort of lad to have at the house. He's a bit too fond o' the lasses and mony's the tale in the place about him and his wild pranks and fickle heart. Not but that the poor lad has had a hard fight wi' life. His father's just a sour, cross-grained, miserly body that never did a kind deed nor spoke a gude word o' anybody. The mother died when Douglas was but a wee bairn toddling about. He's had any sort o' education, but he's a clever lad and wi' a wonderful aptitude for all sorts of accomplishments, music and drawing and the like. But he won't steady down and he won't work. He's main anxious to be a soldier, but his father hates the military and won't hear o' it. So he's just been doing a bit office work here and there. He was at the Court House a while, but his mischievous pranks got him into disgrace. Now I think he's in the wine merchants', McDougall & Co., in the High Street."

"Perhaps," I said hesitatingly, "he's got a worse name than he deserves. He is only young and full of life and spirits. He doesn't *look* bad."

Grannie shook her dear old head. "Oh, my bairn," she said wistfully, "you're just like all your sex, ready to excuse any man's wickedness so that his looks please you. There's the Laird now. He's jest as good and straight and God fearin' a man as ever walked this earth, but he's not popular with maid or matron, though he's a good match and would make just an excellent husband."

"No doubt," I said vaguely.

I did not want to discuss the Laird and his virtues.

My mind would run on Douglas Hay, and I only saw that picture of him which had imprinted itself so strongly on my memory. The picture of the tall light figure coming towards me under the ash trees, with the Highland bonnet on the sunny brown hair, and the clear evening light shining in the blue eyes.

"How old is Douglas Hay?" I asked, rising from the chair and twisting up the long thick tresses of hair Grannie had at last released.

"How your mind runs on the lad," she said, looking at me somewhat anxiously. "About twenty-two or three, I'm thinking; not more. He'll be leaving Inverness soon," she went on more cheerfully. "He's away to Edinburgh the beginning o' the month."

"I suppose that won't make any difference to me," I said. "I'm not likely to see much of him if he has such a bad character."

"Don't speak so vexed like, dearie," said the old lady gently. "It's my duty to look after you, and I only warn you against Douglas because there's no denying he's very handsome and very fascinating, and he might just take it into his head to flirt with you out of pure mischief, and because you're a stranger and so different from all the lassies here. It's every new face wi' him for a time, and then a laugh and a good-bye—and all's over. He's a masterful way wi' him too, has Douglas, and no one can be just more agreeable and pleasant when he likes. I'm not for taking the lad's character away, dearie, but he's not just the safest person in the world for a bit lassie to be thinking of!"

"As far as I can learn," I said, somewhat pettishly, "he has not done anything so very bad, and his faults and sins seem only those of youth and light-heartedness. Because he laughs and talks and dances, and is so gay and amusing, I suppose he is called a flirt. I know all the girls to-night seemed only too delighted when he noticed them or danced with them."

"I'm sorry he's made you his champion so quickly," said Grannie, with that strange unwisdom of age which will warn youth against a scarcely foreseen danger as an inducement to rush into it. "You are mere a child—you cannot possibly know what men are or what the world is."

"I don't want to know," I said, with a half-smothered

yawn for I was getting tired and sleepy at last. "I only want to be loved and to be happy just for a little while, Grannie; just while I am young and free as I am now. You know," I went on with sudden gravity, born of a memory I had tried to banish, "you know the doctors say I shall not live very long, and so it would not do for me to trouble about things that concern most girls—dresses and sweethearts and amusements. But you are all so kind to me here that I cannot help loving you, Grannie, and I feel as if I could be very, very happy."

"God knows, my bairn, I should like to make you so," she said earnestly, the tears gathering in the kind blue eyes that met my own, "but I'm no going to have you desponding. You're young, and youth is aye, a grand thing to build on, and I've no such faith in doctors as to believe they can always know what is to happen. I am sure we'll do you good here—it's just the air and the place and the life for you. But now, dearie, to bed, to bed. I'm no willing to see pale cheeks and heavy eyes the morn. You'll just say your bit prayer at your auld Grannie's knee as if you were a bairn once more, for ye missed family worship to-night, and then ye'll shut those bonnie brown eyes and sleep well and soundly till I bring your cup o' warm milk at eight o'clock."

And like a child I knelt at her knee and heard her own petition join with mine and a great peace and content stole over me—a new sense of love and protection, and rest and hope.

That night I slept soundly, but towards morning I dreamt that I was being married to the Laird with great state and ceremony, when suddenly, instead of the wedding march the organ began to play "Auld Robin Gray" and ringing loud and clear above its rolling chords I heard the voice of Douglas Hay, and I fell down on the floor of the church in a passion of bitter weeping.

I woke to see the sunlight streaming into my room and hear the kindly greeting of Grannie—woke with beating heart and tear-wet eyes, but strangely, indescribably happy to be able to say to myself, "It was only a dream—only a dream."

But some dreams are prophetic.

CHAPTER V.

"THE KIRK."

"Let us wander by the mill, bonnie lassie, O,
To the cove beside the rill, bonnie lassie, O,
When the glens rebound the call
Of the roaring waters' fall
Through the mountains' rocky hall
Bonnie lassie, O!"

My journal chronicles the events of each day of that visit to Scotland with the exactness almost of Clarissa Harlowe, but I do not intend to give those extracts here with the minuteness of detail I then delighted in. I never in my life had been so purely, innocently happy, for never in my life before had I experienced what it was to be loved, and thought of, and cared for, as they all loved and cared for me. No wonder that my health improved, that roses bloomed on my white cheeks, and strength returned to my languid frame, and in a month's time I looked a different being to the pale, thin, sickly girl who had come to Craig Bank.

I had been three weeks with Grannie before I went to church. The first Sunday I was not well, and she would not let me go. The second it rained heavily and persistently from morning till night. On the third, however, the sun was shining warmly and brilliantly, and at breakfast she announced that it would be as well if I did go to "the Kirk" with her. "No braws, lassie," she said, as I ran upstairs to dress. "It's no fitting that one should be in any way remarkable in the house o' the Lord, distracting the mind o' puir weak bodies that are aye moved wi' carnal vanities. You being the young leddie from London, they will be aye looking and wondering about ye, so just put on a quiet gown and bonnet and pay no heed to anybody ye may see."

"Very well, Grannie," I said meekly, and forthwith proceeded to examine my wardrobe and wonder what I had best select.

It was a warm June day—surely no one could call a white dress remarkable or unsuitable. I decided on white, a plain, white muslin, and toned it down with a black lace hat in which were twisted some poppies and cornflowers.

Grannie looked at me doubtfully. I think she objected in her heart to the poppies, but as the bells were ringing there was no time to change the hat. So we sallied forth together, through the quiet streets on our way to the Presbyterian church.

And how quiet the streets of a Scotch town are on a Sunday. It seemed to me as if the hush of Death or sleep lay on the silent houses, with their half-drawn blinds and look of desertion.

Then the whole aspect and demeanour of the people seemed altered. They exchanged grave bows and greetings, but the usual smiling welcome or jest were absent. We met the whole family of Camerons marching in a solemn and imposing procession.

I thought Grannie would have spoken to, or joined them, but she did not, and even Bella's laughing face wore a new expression of gravity that was almost awe-inspiring.

I followed Grannie to her pew, and took my place beside her—then, quite unabashed by the preternatural gravity of my surroundings, I proceeded to look about at the congregation.

A little to the right of our seats I caught sight of the wavy brown hair and handsome profile of Douglas Hay. He half turned and our eyes met. I could not help smiling in recognition of the quick flash of interrogation in his eyes, but I was angered too at the sudden flush that rose to my face, and wondered a little why the fact of his presence should have so suddenly altered—for me—all the gloom and dulness of the surroundings.

The service commenced, and its novelty astonished and puzzled me not a little.

It seemed so strange to stand up to pray, and then to hear an extempore prayer delivered to the Almighty with a personal and familiar method of speech and expression that seemed more fitted for ordinary conversation.

It grated terribly on my ideas of reverence, it seemed to me rather presumptuous than otherwise to favour the Lord with a series of personal and parish incidents and difficulties that had occurred during the week. To hear people spoken of by their Christian names as "*his servant so and so*" or harangued for faults and short *comings* in a manner that was, to say the least of it, *embarrassing*.

Then the length of that petition! Heavens! How tired I was and how terribly monotonous was its mode of delivery.

It was with a sense of intense relief that at last I heard it come to a close, and received the information that the congregation would now sing, to the praise and glory of God, the one hundred and twenty-fifth Psalm.

With all the will in the world to be grave and reverent I could not keep my gravity when a being, whom I learnt was called "the Precentor," rose to his feet and gave forth in a cracked, harsh voice the air of this psalm.

To anyone with musical ears it was simply torture, and alas! when the congregation took it up just as each felt inclined, in any key, and without the slightest notion of harmony, or part singing, I positively shuddered.

The dissonance was indescribable, and the fervour and force thrown into the so-called singing only made it more horrible.

Then came some reading of the Scriptures, and another long extempore prayer, after which another ear torturing psalm, sung to the melancholy "Coleshill," led the way to the sermon.

Oh, that sermon! For long it lived in my memory. Its involved phrases, its bigoted and perverted rendering of incidents that were surely never meant to be accepted in any literal sense—its perversion of texts to suit some special "point"—its occasional lapse into personality—its apparent familiarity with the person, attributes, and intentions of the Supreme Being—all this jarred upon me to a degree that left my brain irritated, my heart indignant, and any spiritual feelings I might have experienced, in a state of offence and disgust.

I inwardly resolved I would not go to the "Kirk" again, and I was thankful when the service was over and I once more found myself in the open air.

Grannie was speaking to some friends, when Douglas Hay approached me in his "Sunday get-up." I thought how much handsomer he had looked in his Highland "bonnet" and knickerbockers.

"Have you survived it?" he asked, in a mischievous whisper. "I wish you could have seen the expression of your face! It was a study. Do you intend coming to the afternoon service? You've only done half, you

know. There's the 'interval' and then we go through it all again."

"Oh, I couldn't!" I exclaimed in despair. "Surely Grannie won't make me?"

I looked round for her, but she was engaged discussing some point of the discourse with another old lady, and had apparently forgotten my presence.

"Listen," said Douglas Hay, coming close to me and speaking low and hurriedly. "I will call round at Craig Bank when Mrs. Lindsay has gone to the service and take you for a walk. That will be much better. It is a shame to waste a lovely afternoon like this. I'll show you the Islands. Will you come?"

"Yes—certainly," I said readily. I had no thought of wrong-doing. I did not know even that to go for a walk on a Sunday was counted quite a heinous offence among the good Scotch folk of the town. I only felt the natural reaction of spirits after the penance of the morning. I only thought of the delight of liberty and action and congenial companionship. Then the Camerons came up, and Douglas Hay merely lifted his hat and left us.

"Don't be speerin' after that young man," said Bella, sharply. "He's a ne'er-do-weel, and not fit company for you."

I laughed uneasily. "How you all do abuse that poor young Hay," I said. "It's quite a case of 'give a dog a bad name.'"

"And the best thing to do when the dog deserves it," said Bella. "But how did you like the service? You'd better come home with us, and then we'll go together to the afternoon."

"Oh, no, thank you!" I cried in unfeigned terror. "I really couldn't, Bella. I never sat through such a wearisome and depressing service in my life. I've had quite enough for one day, thank you!"

"Grannie will be shocked at you. It's no proper observance of the Sabbath if you don't go to the two services. The interval is only for rest and lunch, then it's concluded."

"I can't help that," I said obstinately. "I simply can't and won't go through all that again."

"Will you come to the Free Church wi' us to-night instead?" asked Bella. "We often go. You'll like it

better than this, and the minister, Mr. Grant, he is a powerful preacher, very different to poor old Gillespie."

I shook my head. "I don't want any more church or preaching to-day," I said.

"You're a heathenish, wicked, wee thing," said Bella, giving my arm a pinch. "And I've a mind not to tell you what Kenneth's been planning for you—a rare fine jaunt I can tell ye, my lady."

"Kenneth!" I echoed in surprise. "Why, what did he trouble himself about me for?"

"Oh, listen to the innocence of the creature," laughed Bella. "When she knows she's just turned the lad's head with her big eyes and her soft smiles, and her dainty Southern ways. Kenneth's aye quiet and serious for his age, but he's got eyes in his head I can tell ye, and for what does he go to Grannie's every evening and teach ye reel steps, and how to pronounce the Scotch songs, and get up at five in the morning to fetch ye rowans from Craig-Phadric, eh, my little lady—just tell me that?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Bella," I said gravely, "I never noticed that he did all these things."

"Poor Kenneth," said Bella, with mocking compassion. "I'm thinking he'd just be heart-broken if I told him o' that cruel speech. You never noticed, didn't ye? Oh! fie—fie—coz. Well, just open your eyes a bit and try to notice. I'm thinking the poor lad's brain is softening, myself, and his appetite is just pitiable."

I laughed outright. Not for a moment did I believe her, or credit my solemn-faced cousin, Kenneth, with any such feeling as she implied. True he had been at Grannie's very often and taught me Scotch songs, or rather how to pronounce the words of them, but I looked upon him as an elder brother more than anything else. To think of Kenneth Cameron regarding me with anything like sentiment was infinitely amusing. Kenneth, who never met my eyes, whose greeting was always cold and abrupt, who had never even made an attempt at a compliment even in the rough and ready fashion of Alick Macpherson and some of his friends. No wonder I laughed.

All the same, I glanced somewhat curiously at the *Cameron group*, among which he stood, almost a head

taller than any of them. He was watching Bella and myself, but he did not approach us.

At the same moment Grannie having concluded her discussion turned to see if I was ready to go home.

I said good-bye to Bella and joined the old lady.

I fear I fell rather out of favour with her by refusing to attend the afternoon service. But I was resolute on that point, and she gave way at last.

She went off, and so did old Jean, and I, with a sense of freedom, mischief, and longing all combined, was left alone in the house to await my expected visitor.

CHAPTER VI.

OFFENDED PREJUDICES.

"O waly, waly, love is bonnie
A little time when it is new ;
But when it's auld, it waxes cauld,
And fades awa' like morning dew."

I HAD not long to wait.

I was standing at the window when I saw Douglas Hay approaching.

I ran to the front door and opened it.

"I am afraid I cannot go out," I said. "Grannie and Jean have gone to church, and I am taking care of the house."

"Oh, botheration!" was the curt and comprehensive reply. "Can't they get in?" he added presently, "you might leave the door open. No one would think of entering."

"I am afraid Grannie would be angry," I said doubtfully; "she did not *say* I was to stay in the house, but she seemed to expect it."

"Well, may I stay and take care of it with you?" he asked, "she can't object to that."

"I shall be delighted," I answered, with perfect truth. All the same I was sorry to miss my walk. I looked wistfully out at the blue sky and bright sunshine.

"I know you are longing to go," he said, smiling. "Shall we risk it? If we are quick we can be back before they are home."

"But we can't possibly go to the Islands," I said; "*they are a long way off* I know, for my cousins told *me*."

"We need not go there to-day, some other afternoon I will take you if you will let me."

"Very well," I agreed, and ran off for my hat, returning in a minute to find Douglas Hay at the piano, softly playing over some of the now familiar Scotch melodies.

"How beautifully you sang 'Auld Robin Gray' that night at the Macphersons'," I said. "I have often wished to tell you. I wish you would sing it for me now."

He regarded me with mock horror. "What! sing a profane song on the Sabbath! Oh! you little heathen; why the good folks of the town would be for excommunicating us. Don't you know you musn't even play the piano on Sunday."

"What nonsense!" I exclaimed impatiently. "I don't believe that. How can music be wrong? If it is wrong to play one instrument, it is wrong to play all. If it is wrong to sing one sort of melody, it must be wrong to sing another. They have organs in the churches and they sing——"

"No, I beg your pardon," he interrupted, "they *drone*. Surely you learnt that this morning! The more doleful and out of tune the performance, the more pleasing they consider it."

"But that is surely foolish," I exclaimed. "Why should we not offer God our best, if we offer anything?"

"Indeed, Miss Lindsay," he said with sudden gravity, "it would puzzle a wiser head than yours to make out the why and wherefore of Scotch ideas on religion. I gave it up in despair long ago. You may sing in the kirk, but it would be a sin to do so in the house. You may walk to the service, but it is a sin to walk in field or lane for sake of exercise."

"Then," I said abruptly, "why did you ask me to go for a walk with you? Would not Grannie be angry?"

"You are not a Presbyterian," he said coolly, "and you are only a visitor here and may surely be allowed some little liberty. You walk on Sundays in England."

"Of course," I said laughing. "In what does the sin consist?"

"Perhaps," he said, "because it is a pleasanter thing to do than to sit in a stuffy church, listening to illogical and bigoted discourses, or have one's ears tortured by

bad singing, or read dry books on sound doctrine and other edifying but dreary subjects."

"But why should all pleasant things be wrong?" I asked.

"You had better inquire of the minister," he said. "You will be deluged with texts, overwhelmed with prophecies—told you are inclined to worship Bel and The Dragon, and generally scolded, upbraided and declaimed against. I hope it may convince you. I have gone through it all. I am a signal failure, and supposed to have fallen hopelessly away from grace. I assure you that the more dreary and melancholy and depressing they can make the Sabbath in Scotland the more praiseworthy and acceptable do they consider themselves."

"But why should they think only their method is right?" I persisted. "I see no harm in the service I have been accustomed to. For the matter of that, I would go to any church and witness any form of worship. Surely it is the spirit that makes it of any value. No religion can be absolutely wrong if its meaning is to worship with reverence or faith the one great Being in whom we believe. We believe in one God—so we say—how can it matter to Him in what way we express that belief? As far as I can make out in the New Testament, Christ did not establish any set form or any special church. As for Himself, he certainly walked on the Sabbath day and worked too!"

"Bravo!" laughed Douglas Hay. "You've got some sense in that small head of yours, I can see. I must get old Gillespie to tackle you. It would be rare fun. But come," he added, closing the piano, "if we are going for this walk we had better be off, or else we shall find the gude folks all coming back from kirk."

"I wonder if Grannie will be angry with me," I said, still doubtfully. "I really did not know they thought it a sin to go for a walk."

"She has not forbidden it," he said.

"No, but probably she never thought I would do so."

"Oh, come along, and chance consequences," he said lightly, and nothing loth I obeyed him. Douglas Hay had a certain masterful way with him that rather swept *one off one's feet*. I thought it a very pleasant way as *we strolled on together* in the warm June afternoon, and

all the peace and fragrance of the country air seemed strangely still and sweet. We grew very confidential. He told me all about his life at college and his friends there, his escapades and tricks, and the many scrapes he had contrived to get into again and again. I, on my part, favoured him with a good deal of my personal history, in which he seemed more interested than I could have imagined possible. We drifted into discussion on all sorts of subjects. Now and then I was surprised to find how deep a vein of sentiment and sadness underlay that apparent recklessness and mirth.

"I often think," he said, "that I am destined to play the part of buffoon in life. Everyone has always seemed to expect it of me. I must have a smile and jest for ever on my lips, and be ready to dance, laugh, joke, and amuse others, however 'down' I feel myself. It is my groove, I suppose; we all have one."

"I wonder what mine is," I said musingly.

"I think I could tell you. It is to be sympathetic, and natural, and graceful, to give the eye a sense of pleasure and the mind a sense of trust. That is how you impressed me, at least. Whatever you do seems just the right thing done at the right moment. I could never imagine you being self-conscious or losing that graceful little air of self-possession. There are people, you know, who always irritate one, and others who always rest one. I should think you could make life very pleasant for anyone you cared for."

I laughed. "You are flattering me and giving me a much better character than I deserve. I am not, as a rule, a favourite with people."

"Because you require to be known," he said quickly. "That I can quite imagine; but don't you know that certain natures arrive at an immediate understanding with each other, while others take years and years to get even tolerably intimate. I think now, you and I would be very good friends."

My face grew warmer as I met the frank blue eyes. I thought of all I had heard against him, of his reputation as a flirt, of the many warnings from Grannie and my cousins.

"What makes you think so?" I asked, looking away from him to where the warm light lay over the dark hills

and the fair green country with its lines of hedges and copse.

"What? Oh, I can't exactly explain. I feel it. I felt it the moment I saw you. You are quite different to any girl I have ever met. As a rule, I don't like girls; I am much more popular with women—you, I suppose, would consider them quite old women. One can talk to them and not be expected to flirt or make love. I hate this place for that reason. If you are seen walking once or twice down the High Street with a girl, you are immediately chaffed and twitted about it. My plan is to do that with a different one every day; it gives them some trouble then to decide which of the many is to be the object of my wavering affections."

"No wonder," I said, "that you are called a flirt."

He laughed. "But I am not one—really I am not. It is very hard to live down a reputation or alter people's opinions. You will hear a great deal that is bad of me; perhaps I deserve it, I daresay I do, but I hope I have some redeeming points—at least, I should like you to think so. I can be very loyal to anyone I care for, and I never forget a kindness; as for other things, well God knows I'm a graceless, ill-tempered, suspicious devil! My education and teaching are to blame for that. I've had a hard bringing-up, Miss Lindsay; it's bound to tell on one soon or late."

His face grew cold and hard. A sudden silence fell between us. We stood beside a little stream that ran through green meadows; above our heads were the feathery green boughs of the rowan trees. In the blue sky above Craig-Phadric, a few white clouds were gathering. His eye rested on them for a moment.

"There," he said suddenly, "is an illustration of the difference between a man and a woman. Her moods and intentions, even her promises, are like those clouds yonder; now here, now there, now resting, now floating off to new points and new scenes. A man's heart is like the sky beneath those clouds. You cannot see it always, but it is there, steadfast, sure, patient, enduring for all time."

"I think a woman is quite as firm, and steadfast, and *patient*, too, when she loves," I said quickly.

"Aye, *when*," he said, with the old mocking smile on

his lips. "But that's not often. She *thinks* she loves ; she says so, and a man believes her. But the drifting clouds are not more fickle than her fancies, the winds of heaven more uncertain than her moods."

"What can you know about women?" I exclaimed indignantly, "you are much too young to have had an experience of any value."

"Am I?" he said, somewhat bitterly, "then you are no student of character, Miss Lindsay. I am far older than my years, and as for experience—well, the less said of that the better. Now I suppose we had best be turning homewards. I don't want to get you into a scrape, so it might be as well for you to be in the house before your grandmother returns."

We began to retrace our steps, but I felt less at ease with him than I had done an hour before, and I began to wonder if my walk this afternoon was not a piece of imprudence, to say the least of it.

"You must not forget your promise to go to the Islands with me," said Douglas Hay presently. "I should like to think I had been the first to take you there."

"Very well," I said, "but would you mind if my cousin Bella came with us? I am afraid Grannie won't let me go alone with you."

"You need not tell her," he said quickly. "I know I'm not a favourite either with her or your cousins. And," he added, laughing, "though it seems a rude thing to say, I should very much object to the presence of a third person. Two are company, you know."

"Well," I said, laughing also, "I will see what I can do ; but I must ask permission."

"You'll never get it then," he said gloomily. "I know that very well."

"One can but try," I said cheerfully. "Good gracious—" I broke off suddenly, "why there is Grannie—and my cousin Kenneth!"

We were so close to them that we involuntarily came to a standstill. Never in all my life shall I forget the amazement, wrath and indignation that spoke out in Grannie's face, nor the cold, haughty greeting with which Kenneth favoured my companion.

Not that Douglas Hay was one whit abashed, I think *he rather enjoyed the scene.*

"I found your grand daughter moping in the house alone, Mrs. Lindsay," he said, "and I persuaded her that a little walk was the best thing for her. You really must not scold her."

"I'm thinking, Mr. Hay, that as you're better acquainted with the manners and customs o' the place than my grand-daughter, ye might hae been more circumspect," said the old lady freezingly. "It's no usual, Athole, my dear, for people to take walks about the town on the Sabbath. I thought ye would have known that."

"I didn't think there was any harm in it, Grannie," I said, feeling rather abashed by her stern face and Kenneth's shocked one.

"Perhaps it was my ain fault; I should have warned you," she answered more kindly. "Well, Mr. Hay, you'll excuse me saying good-bye, and I hope another time you find a young leddy alone and ignorant of just what's considered right and proper, in a place to which she is a stranger, you'll no be takin' advantage o' her ignorance. I'm no pleased wi' ye, and that's the truth."

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Lindsay," said the young fellow humbly; "but you know I never did hold with the prejudices and customs of the place, and your grand-daughter is equally liberal-minded; for the life of me I never could see why it was wrong to take a walk on Sunday."

"I'm no wishin' to argue the matter," said the old lady with dignity. "You knew my opinions even if Athole did not. I am more than sorry to think ye should hae been sae forgetful."

She did not offer to shake hands but turned away, and Kenneth, with a stiff bow, followed. Douglas Hay and I looked at each other.

"Please forgive me," he said timidly; "I hope she won't scold you. I'm afraid there's a poor chance for the Islands now."

A quick glance from the blue eyes—a lingering hand-pressure—then he was gone, and feeling as if all the light and sunshine of the summer day had gone with him, I followed Grannie into the house.

CHAPTER VII.

A RANDOM SPEECH.

"All you that are in love, and cannot it remove,
I pity the pains you endure;
For experience makes me know
That your hearts are full of woe—
A woe that no mortal can cure."

I was in disgrace.

Yes, there was no doubt about it. I certainly was in disgrace with Grannie. I could not have believed the kind old lady could have worn so freezing and dignified an aspect as she adopted, and kept up too, for the remainder of that eventful Sunday.

As for Kenneth, he sulked—that is the only word that expresses it. But that did not trouble me in the least; I thought they were both very foolish to make such a fuss about a trifle.

After all, what could a short walk on a Sunday afternoon matter to anyone? I could not see that it was wrong, and a natural indignation rose in my mind against the follies and shackles of a superstition that could turn an innocent recreation into the semblance of a sin.

The dreary monotony of a Scotch Sabbath had not, as yet, been very strongly impressed upon my mind. When I grew better acquainted with its rigorous exactions and wearisome formalities, I confess I wondered greatly that an enlightened people could so burden their lives and consciences, or find any fitting argument by which to justify themselves for so doing.

I shall never forget old Jean's horror and consternation when I asked her if she really supposed the whole world *had* been created in seven days, and that the seventh, on which the Creator rested from His work, was the identical Sabbath now observed by Christian Churches.

Of course she believed this firmly, and it was in vain I tried to convince her that the age of the world was far greater than the Book of Genesis allowed, and that Science could prove, by geological investigations and discoveries, the absurdity of a literal acceptance of that much-abused word, "Day."

But my task was hopeless. Every word of Scripture,

according to Jean, was a direct inspiration from the Almighty. It was always "His message," "His ordinance," "His prophets," "His judgments." Any one at once so narrow-minded, and so absolutely unconvinced, I never met with.

I was considered a most audacious and godless sinner for my boldness in questioning anything they believed, or pointing out any inaccuracies or discrepancies between various chapters and texts in their perpetually quoted "Scriptures." I candidly confess that a prolonged residence in Caledonia, dearly as I love it and its people, would have ended in making a rank infidel of me. It was a trial to patience and common sense, and a wilful blinding of mind and vision to the light of later days and the larger and more cultured views of men of science and learning.

But I now learnt that discussion only led to anger and disapprobation without any better result. I had thought so much on those subjects myself, and had led a life so much beyond my years, that I could not understand why anyone should deem it wrong to take a new or unprejudiced view of religious matters, instead of fettering their minds with the customs and faiths of their ancestors.

If material progress was a natural result of life, why should not spiritual advance march with it. Why should one always accept what was told one, and never seek to look beyond the line that had been long, long before worked out, when superstition was rampant and education limited?

But when I spoke like this I was looked upon with horror and amazement. I am not at all sure that a good deal of it was not put down to the one fact of that Sunday walk with Douglas Hay. Even Kenneth took me to task for that in his solemn fashion, but I cared very little for his opinion, and told him so with a frankness that I fear was less polite than candid.

I think Grannie's wrath lasted for two days. Then she began to soften, and I was received back into favour. I found out, however, that some great festivity was on the *tapis*. There were long discussions with Jean and with Bella, and great studying of cookery books, and I heard anxious questions as to how many could possibly

be seated at the dining-table. The result of all this was conveyed to me at last by Grannie.

"I've been thinking," she said, "that I must just ask a few folk to dinner. The house is but small, and I cannot well accommodate more than eight at the table. Myself, and yourself lassie, make two—then the Laird and your Aunt and Uncle Cameron, five—and Mistress Macpherson, six—and Mr. and Mrs. Gillespie will complete the number. I'll just ask your two cousins and young Macpherson to drop in later in the evening to make it more lively for you."

"Oh, don't trouble about that, Grannie," I said laughing, "I shall enjoy studying the people, especially the Laird. He amuses me immensely. Was he ever seen to smile?"

"Now—now, lassie," said the old lady rebukingly, "I canna' have ye making fun o' your elders in that licht fashion. It's no just respectful."

I only laughed, and smothered the dear old thing with kisses.

"But he's so dreadfully grave and—ponderous," I said.

"And what can a bit bairn o' seventeen like you know of the cares and responsibilities of a man?" said she, gravely. "He has a large estate and is a very good and wise landlord, I can tell ye. No tenants in all the Highlands are better looked after than those at Corriemoor, and Donald Campbell of Corriemoor is just as good a man, and comes of as good a family as any in Scotland."

"Oh, no doubt," I said indifferently, "but I'm not a bit clannish, Grannie, and I couldn't be bothered thinking out people's pedigrees. What better are they for their ancestors? One likes a man for his own sake—not because he was a Bruce or a Stuart or a Macgregor, or the descendant of some great Clan, who, after all, were nothing better than freebooters originally—whose great deeds of heroism seem to have been chiefly the result of whisky."

"Oh, fie—fie on you, lassie," said Grannie, deeply shocked at my want of patriotic feeling. "And you wi' Scotch blood in your veins—aye, and good blood too, though misfortune has befallen our folk for more than half a century. I'm just shocked at ye, A'hole. You ought to be proud o' your descent, and not making a jest and a mock o' it in that feckless fashion."

"Oh, I'm very bad, I know," I said, laughing at the grave old face. "Don't waste time in trying to improve me, Grannie. Let me hear about this grand dinner-party. I feel quite excited. Will you let me do the table for you—with flowers I mean?"

"Well, I'll consider about that," said Grannie, thoughtfully. "I'm not just sure about ye, Athole. You've many foreign ways; and you're a wee bit flighty at times, for all ye seem so grave and so demure. Ye might just take it into your head to play tricks on me, if I gave ye permission. We're no used to flummeries and innovations here—no Russian and French setting out o' food wi' flowers and fruits spread about honest roast meats and vegetables—just as if they grew together, or were aye intended to be side by side."

"But, Grannie, a table looks so much prettier," I argued. "And half the pleasure in eating comes from pleasant surroundings."

"I'm no sure—I'm no sure," repeated the old lady, doubtfully. "These new-fangled ways don't suit old-fashioned folks like myself, dearie. However, I'm not saying I won't let ye try your hand. It will give ye occupation and keep ye out o' mischief perhaps."

"What mischief do I ever get into, Grannie?" I asked, pouting. "You're giving me a very bad character!"

"Oh! ye may make pretence of being so good and so solemn, my bit lassie, but your eyes tell another story; and you're just turning the heads o' all the lads in the place."

"Now—now, Grannie, you know that's not true. They're kind and polite because I'm a stranger—that's all."

She drew me into her kindly arms. "I'm no wishing to make ye an auld wife yet, my bairn. But I should be right glad to have ye make your home in Scotland, and settle down wi' a good steady loving husband. I know you're not happy at home, little as ye've told me; and I like to see your eyes bright and the colour come into your wee bit face, and to hear ye laugh and sing about the house as ye do now."

"I'm so happy here," I said, with a sigh of deep content, as I leant my head against her. "But I don't want to settle down, Grannie," I added hurriedly. "I

should hate to be married—so please don't begin match-making for me. Besides—now, don't look shocked—but, really and truly, I don't think I *could* marry a Scotchman. They're so uninteresting."

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," remarked a grave voice behind me. I started from Grannie's arms, blushing and confused. Kenneth stood in the door-way—a great bunch of roses in his hand.

"How did you come in?—I never heard ye," said Grannie, rising to welcome him. He was her favourite grandson, and I think he was also warmly attached to her.

"I found the hall-door open," he said, "and so I walked in without knocking. I hope I'm forgiven for overhearing Athole's unflattering speech."

"It is a punishment for eaves-dropping," I said. "What lovely roses, Kenneth, where did you get them?"

"I brought them for you," he said, somewhat brusquely. "And a message from Bella. She wants you to come round at three o'clock and go for a walk. Will you be willing?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "If Grannie doesn't want me. We are discussing a party," I went on, to hide my confusion. "It is quite exciting. A dinner party, too!"

"Oh, I heard of that, from Bella," he answered—offering me the roses somewhat awkwardly.

I took them with delight. They were lovely. A great fresh fragrant bunch, of every colour, from creamy white to gold and crimson.

"Thank you so much. It was very good of you," I said—wishing he had not overheard that unfortunate speech of mine, or that the rigid formality of his own face and speech would relax in some small degree. But I fear my random words had shot home. He looked very stern and very uncomfortable; and not all Grannie's attempts to set him at ease seemed to have the least effect.

She told him about her dinner-party, and that I wished to decorate the table foreign-fashion.

"I'm thinking the Laird will wonder at such an innovation," she said. "But I'm half inclined to let the lassie have her way, for all that."

"Oh! Is this party in the Laird's honour?" I asked. "What *has* he done to deserve it?"

Then Kenneth looked straight at me—his handsome grave face wearing an expression of sarcasm and ill-temper.

"He escorted you home from the Macphersons," he said.

I laughed aloud—peal after peal of merriment. I could neither stop nor subdue my mirth, though I saw that neither he nor Grannie could understand its cause. In the midst of it Jean came to the door to consult her mistress about some domestic matters, and the old lady left the room.

I tried to resume my usual demeanour, but I found it very difficult.

Kenneth looked so terribly solemn, and he evidently considered that speech of his such a "facer," that every time I thought of it I trembled on the brink of another fit of laughter.

"I am glad you are so easily amused," he said at last. "I thought Scotchmen were too *uninteresting* even to afford you a laugh at their expense."

"I did not think you took offence so easily," I said—"or could be so sarcastic."

"I wonder you ever gave yourself the trouble to think of me at all," he answered huffily. "And, as a rule, I do not easily take offence. I am not aware I have done so now."

"Well, it is a very good imitation," I said. "And your speech about the Laird was really too funny. Has he never seen any other young lady home from a party, that you all seem to think his doing so such a very remarkable occurrence?"

"No doubt," answered Kenneth, stiffly, "he has done so before. But not to my knowledge, and certainly not in Inverness."

"Oh! Would it have been shouted from the house-tops if he had?" I said carelessly. "What funny people you are—and what a fuss you do make about trifles."

"We are unfortunate in not pleasing you," he said, still very stiffly.

"I never said you did not please me. I am getting very fond of Scotland and Scotch people, but that does not prevent my wondering at your little—peculiarities."

He was silent. His eyes remained fixed on the carpet, and the moody expression of his face slightly cleared.

"I should like," he said suddenly, and with an effort at geniality which was palpably an effort—"I should like to know what sort of man you do consider—interesting?"

"How that speech rankles in your mind," I said, laughing, and lifting the bunch of roses to my face to inhale their fragrance. "Well—suppose I said a man who makes one *think* about him—puzzle over what he says and does, whom one never quite understands, and in whose life there seems always one more page to be read. It is when one comes to that last page—when there seems nothing more to know—nothing more to learn, that a person ceases to interest one. At least that is my idea."

"Thank you," he said coldly. "You are very candid. I see that I have been making a great mistake about you."

"In what way?" I asked lifting my eyes to his and wondering a little why they seemed so sad and—pained.

"I have been looking upon you as a child," he said, more gently than he had yet spoken. "A child knowing little of life, and less of men and women. I see I have been mistaken."

"I may not know much of life or people," I said. "But I have thought a great deal about them. I do not expect to find either what I have imagined, or what I would like."

"You are quite right," he said. "Believe me you will not."

Then he took up his hat, and quite abruptly said good-bye and left the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

JEALOUSY.

"Lofty firs and ashes cool
The lovely banks o'erspread,
And view—deep-bending in the pool
Their shadows' watery bed!"

"BELLA," I said, as we were on our way to the Islands by the banks of the Ness. "Is your brother Kenneth very easily offended—touchy, I mean?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to know."

"Well, I think he's a bit quick-tempered," said Bella cautiously. "Perhaps we've spoilt him at home. There

were such a lot of girls, and mother did make an awful fuss about him. Then he's so good and steady and has never given any trouble or uneasiness to us."

"Oh, I'm sure he's very good," I said carelessly. "But I wonder why 'good' young men are so heavy and so hard to get on with. Now Kenneth always seems to me to be seeing all sorts of harm and sin in the most innocent actions—to be a perpetual rebuke as it were to everything that is light and gay and amusing. Does he think life such a solemn thing?"

"Not that I'm aware of," said Bella. "But you're a frivolous wee body, Athole, and can't expect him to be just companionable to you. That's more in Douglas Hay's line."

"Ah!" I said with wicked enjoyment of an approaching battle. "Now, he *is* nice, if you like. Nice to look at, nice to talk to, and capital company. I wish," I added discontentedly, "that Grannie would ask him to her party. She might just as well. But she's never forgiven him for that Sunday walk."

"I should think not," said Bella. "It was the most daring thing I ever heard of. He knew better if you did not."

"I think you are the most ridiculous people," I said. "And instead of making Sundays pleasant, you just seem to delight in making it the gloomiest and most depressing day in the week. One would think everyone was dead who walked through the streets at any hour after church-time. If God wanted us all to go into mourning on a Sunday, I should think He would have ordered the birds not to sing, the sun not to shine, the breeze not to blow, and all the flowers to close."

"Now, Athole, we won't begin to argufy," said Bella. "I know you're a wicked, self-opinionated little creature, and because you've travelled in foreign countries and seen all sorts of religious ceremonies, and all kinds of heathenish and godless ways of keeping the Sabbath day, you think you're privileged to be dictating to your elders and betters on the matter."

"I'm not dictating, Bella," I said earnestly. "Perhaps if you knew how perplexed and troubled I *have felt* ever since I began to think about such matters *you'd be more sorry than vexed with me.* It is no use

pretending. I cannot believe and accept a faith just because I'm *told* it is right. Something within me wants to know more about it—is always calling for proof—proof—proof. In the Catholic churches the service was beautiful, but amidst all the singing and the incense and the organ-playing, and the beautiful vestments, one could not help thinking there was so much more of 'man' in the service than of God, and I used to find myself picturing Him looking down on it all and wondering what He thought of it, and if it could really be a matter of importance that on a certain day a certain vestment must be worn, or a certain number of candles lighted, and whether Christ had ever thought it possible that his last, simple, homely meal with his disciples could have been perverted and twisted into a ceremony so widely different as the Mass. And do you know, Bella," I added, growing bolder as I noted the earnestness of her face, "there is another thing which has puzzled me often and often, and that is about the birth of Christ. I cannot but think Joseph and Mary were really His father and mother—that He was one of those mystical, spiritual-minded beings who from time to time have been born into the world to keep alive some religious fervour and feeling in it. I have read His history and heard it discussed by very wise and clever people—people who have made it the study of their lives—not merely accepted it as it has been told to them. Have you ever noticed that he always spoke of himself as the 'Son of Man.' It is his disciples who would call him Son of God, and who really fitted him into the Messianic character as events forced it upon them."

"Where did you learn all this?" asked Bella, looking rather shocked and startled.

"I have read it," I said curtly. "My father has books that you have never even heard of, and they go far, far back into the history of the world. It is curious and interesting to trace out how a leading idea or belief will find acceptance and imitation, until it gets rooted in certain minds as truth."

"I think," said Bella. "We had best not discuss such matters. They only lead us astray. What can a *lassie* like you know of the Scriptures and the history of

the Church, when even a minister who has made it the study of his life is often at fault?"

"It seems to me," I said sadly, "that that is just where we all make the mistake. We are afraid to speak—afraid to discuss our doubts—afraid to question the why and wherefore of our faith, and yet on that faith we are pinning our eternal loss or gain. Oh! how I have lain awake in the dark nights and cried and prayed for something—someone—to tell me the truth! How I have thought that I must be naturally very wicked because it seemed so hard to believe, so easy to question—because I could not help seeing discrepancies and inaccuracies where wiser and better people saw none, and the world seemed so lonely and life so cold and hard, and I could only wonder why I was put there and why I had been made to live without my own will or consciousness, and my head would ache and my eyes burn with crying and self-torture, and I would ask for a sign that religion was true, and for peace or end to my doubts if they were wrong, but there never came any sign, and the doubts—are doubts still."

"Perhaps," said Bella, "God is only trying you. I never imagined you felt or thought so deeply. I must say I cannot follow you, my dear—I have never looked at these matters in the light that you do."

I sighed heavily. We crossed a little bridge now, and stood under drooping shady trees, and the sun shone on the sparkling water, and the quiet blue sky was without a cloud.

I looked at it all in silence. How beautiful, how peaceful the fair earth seemed, and yet how sad and burdened were human hearts.

"It has lasted so long, so long," I said suddenly, "and it must know so much, and could teach so much, and yet it will tell us nothing."

"What?" asked Bella, looking at me in wonder.

"The earth," I said. "The earth that God made, and yet that cannot tell us what He is."

"Oh hush, my dear—hush," she cried in a sort of fear I think at my strange way and words. "Why perplex your head with such matters? It is best not to question. *I think we are not meant to know.*"

I shook my head.

"Perhaps," I said, "it is best for us to think so. But why are we given minds, brains, intelligence? are they not meant for use?"

"No doubt," she said, "but human wisdom is limited. It cannot possibly understand its own origin, or the why and wherefore of its surroundings. I think you had best talk to Mr. Gillespie. He has just a wonderful knowledge of the Scriptures."

I laughed a little, for the first time since our discussion. I thought of Douglas Hay's description of the sermon on Motion, and my own vivid recollection of his discourse the previous Sunday.

"I do not think he would convince me," I said. "Perhaps my nature is sceptical. I know I have always found it hard to believe a thing just because I am told I *must* believe it."

"I am sorry for you, Athole," said Bella, her bright face looking strangely grave, "it's not a nature that I would envy, and it's bound to bring you trouble and unhappiness."

"Perhaps you are right," I said, "but such as it is I must put up with it, my dear. I accept it as my inheritance from the Unknown Source, and I suppose I shall not make it much better than it will allow me."

"I never thought you were so strange or so thoughtful," said Bella, surveying me with a very grave and puzzled expression.

"I don't often speak of these feelings," I said, "and never to people unless I know them, or care for them. But they make up a great deal of my life, and since I was so ill and had to think so much of what might soon be my future—the great strange mystery that lay beyond this world and what we call life here—I have given myself up a great deal more to such thoughts than anyone would believe."

"But you are not going to die, my dearie," said Bella cheerfully. "You're just going to get strong and well and bonnie, and lose all these fancies and feelings. You want young life about you, you've been moped too much with elderly folk, and uncanny books and the like. But *even in this short time* we've done you good and *we will continue to do it*, I'm sure of that."

"Indeed I think you have done me good, a great deal

of good," I said gaily, "but you've made me almost in love with life instead of lessening my hold on it."

"You're not admiring the Islands at all," said Bella. "Isn't it just beautiful here among the ferns and with the glint of the sunshine on the waters. It's a rare fine spot for lovers, here, and—that looks like a pair of them yonder," she added suddenly.

I glanced in the direction she indicated and saw two figures sitting on a fallen tree some distance off. The cool, grey linen dress of the woman made a pretty spot of colour against the bright green background of the many trees. I could only see the back of the man's head, yet there seemed something familiar to me in its pose and in the soft brown curls under the Highland bonnet.

We drew nearer; they were sitting close to the path-way and talking in low confidential voices.

I felt my face grow suddenly hot. I knew who the man was now, even before he had turned his head at the sound of our approaching footsteps.

Bella's hand squeezed my arm.

"It is Douglas Hay," she exclaimed.

"I know," I said quietly, "but we had better go on. It will look odd if we turn back now. He must have seen us."

We walked calmly by the two figures. Douglas lifted his cap; I did not look at him, but my eyes took in every detail of his companion's appearance and dress. She was not young—not—I thought jealously—even pretty; but yet there was something—something about her that seemed to stamp her with a charm, a grace, and an individuality far exceeding mere youth and mere prettiness.

What was it? The perfect figure in its grey linen gown, the smooth hair of pale dead gold, the large eyes with their white drooping lids. No, not one of these, but a curious subtle charm that pervaded them all, and which even in my brief glance I detected and felt.

"Who is she?" I asked Bella eagerly when we were out of earshot.

"I'm not quite sure," answered my cousin, "but I fancy she is Mrs. Dunleith, a widow, who has lately come to live at a little place called "The Rowans," *not far from here*. I can show it you on our way home. *She's not much known yet*. I think she's not been here

above two months, and lives very quietly. Of course," she added, rather spitefully, "Douglas Hay is there at once. I never saw the like o' him. Maid, wife, widow, 'tis all one. He's bound to be dangling after some petticoat."

I was silent. My heart seemed to have grown strangely heavy, and all the golden sunshine of the day looked dull and obscured.

I could not have given any reason for the change, but I was keenly conscious of it, I am afraid—so was Bella. But she was too discreet to say anything, and we walked on, under the green trees and through all the pretty winding ways, in sympathetic silence.

I began to think it would have been better for me if I had not met Douglas Hay—or, having met him, if I had been content to accept other people's opinion of him, instead of forming my own.

CHAPTER IX.

RELIEF.

"Round the sylvan fairy nooks,
Feathery braikens fringe the rocks;
'Neath the brae the burnie jouks,
And ilka thing is cheerie O';
Trees may bud and birds may sing,
Flowers may bloom and verdure spring,
Joy to me they canna' bring,
Unless wi' thee, my dearie O!"

WE crossed another bridge and walked slowly on by the bright blue water on our way home.

My visit to the Islands had been spoilt for me, and I was still too young and took everything too seriously to be able to disguise my feelings. Bella had also grown very quiet and subdued, and for some time we were too busied with our own thoughts to exchange a word.

"I am tired," I said, suddenly, "let us sit down." The banks were quite deserted. The afternoon was growing late. There was no need to be home till seven o'clock for tea, so Bella made no objection. "So you don't know Mrs. Dunleith?" I asked, abruptly. "She is very pretty, isn't she?"

"Oh, the folk here think her quite a beauty," said Bella, "and I believe she is rich, too. 'The Rowans' is but a small place, but the grounds are lovely; she keeps a carriage, too. You've seen her driving several times.

I wonder whether she's come to stay here, or only just for the Meetings."

"What are the Meetings," I asked, absently.

"The Northern Meetings! Why, surely you've heard of them. They take place in September. Highland games—bag-pipe playing—all the pipers of the different clans compete. They wind up with a ball. That is the great event of the year here. But you're sure to go if you stay."

"I have never been to a ball in my life," I said, "I don't think I should care about one."

"Oh yes, you would," said Bella; "you must go to this one, at all events. Flora always does. She will go with Lady Forbes from Blairmore. They generally have a large house party for it."

"And do you think," I persisted, "that Mrs. Dunleith will be there?"

"I shouldn't wonder," she answered. "It all depends on the people she knows, of course. They're very particular. But if her husband was one of the Dunleiths of Morayshire, she's sure to be accepted."

"What funny people you are! Fancy questioning and enquiring all about a person—who they were—and whom they married—and where they came from, before calling or condescending to know them."

"And why not?" said Bella; "it is as well to be particular."

A step close beside us—firm, quick, eager—made me look up, instead of replying. To my surprise I saw Douglas Hay. He doffed the Scotch cap and greeted us with an evident delight in the meeting.

"I'm so glad I've caught you up," he said, breathlessly. Then he shook hands with Bella and dropped down unceremoniously by my side.

"I thought," he began, reproachfully, "that your first visit to the Islands was to be with me. You evidently don't keep your promises, Miss Lindsay."

"I never made one—to you," I said, coldly.

I felt angered with myself, because my heart had given so glad a throb, because the colour had flushed so warmly over cheek and brow, because I could not meet his glance calmly and coldly as Bella did, and I perceived he noticed it.

"Well, it was something very like a promise," he said,

"a mutual agreement, let us say, and now it's broken and of none effect. Hard upon me, Miss Lindsay."

"Do you know Mrs. Dunleith?" interposed Bella, evidently not approving his confidential tone and manner. "You soon made her acquaintance."

"Or—she mine?" he said, with a mischievous glance. "Isn't she a pretty woman?"

"Was it *her* first visit to the Islands?" I asked, ignoring that question.

"Oh, no; you see she lives close by, over there, at that little house shut in from the road-side; she often walks to them."

"Now tell me all about her," said Bella, eagerly. "Is she one of the Dunleiths, of Morayshire? Is she rich—does she mean to stay here? Have many folk called on her?"

"What a string of questions," he said, laughing. "Yes, to them all. Her husband was Robert Dunleith—rather a bad lot, I believe. Went off to Australia—bought a sheep run—made a pile—died judiciously, and left her everything. She came to Scotland for change, has travelled slowly over it, finally rested here, which shows her good taste—has rented 'The Rowans' for a year. Is very anxious to see the Northern Meeting sports, and go to the ball. Now, anything more you would like to know?"

"What people have called upon her?" asked Bella, with a curiosity that surprised me.

"I will get a list of the cards that have been left the very next time I go there," said Douglas Hay, gravely. "I really have not asked her the exact number of visitors she has received. But she has only been here two months."

"Well, you seem very thick with her at all events," said Bella.

"I think," he said, with evident enjoyment of her discomfiture, "that she prefers men's society to women's. She has given one or two charming little dinners. There were no ladies present but herself, and a friend staying with her—a Mrs. Langley White—an Englishwoman."

"And who were the men?" asked Bella, eagerly.

He mentioned two or three names. I was not acquainted with any of them. Bella shook her head at each.

"Fast and military; so that is her taste! Well, I don't think *we* shall call on her."

"She will be heart-broken if you don't," said Douglas Hay, gravely. But I caught the expression in his eye, and knew very well he was only making fun of her. He bent his handsome head to me, and lightly touched my hand. "You see I soon left her when I saw you," he said, softly. "I did feel so cross. I would have given anything to have joined you, there and then. What made you come to-day?"

"Bella asked me," I answered, glancing at that young lady.

She was apparently absorbed in studying the opposite bank and not paying any attention to us.

"And so you don't think Mrs. Dunleith pretty?" he said, presently. "She admired you very much."

"I coloured angrily. "I am sure she did not," I said; "she may have said so, but it is not likely. I am far too—too insignificant looking."

He looked down at his boots, smiling slightly.

"Fairies—as a rule—are not very massive beings," he said. "But that is no reason why they should not be admired, is it, Miss Bella?"

Bella glanced somewhat vacantly at him. "Who is not admired? Are you still discussing Mrs. Dunleith?"

"Dora Dunleith," he said musingly. "That is her name. Isn't it pretty? So alliterative—wonder why one falls into calling some people by their Christian names directly?"

"Always a bad sign," snapped Bella. She was evidently out of temper.

"Why is it a bad sign?" asked Douglas Hay teasingly.

"It shows an inclination to be familiar and—and fast," she answered. "Mrs. Dunleith looks quite capable of being both."

"Yes," he said quietly. "I think she is. But that does not matter, as you are not going to call upon her."

"Have you seen the Laird lately?" asked Bella, by way of changing the subject.

"No," he said, "not to speak to. We are not very friendly you know."

"Grannie is going to entertain him at dinner next week," I remarked.

"Oh—is she?" He glanced keenly at me. "That is a very wise proceeding," he added presently. "I am sure you will find him most entertaining—after dinner."

"He can be very nice when he likes," said Bella warmly. "And he is a very good, sensible, well-informed man."

"I never denied it," said Douglas Hay gravely. "His merits are patent. He has everything a man ought to have—including wealth. It would be hard indeed to find fault with so well-balanced a character."

I laughed. "Really," I said, "I am getting a little tired of the Laird's praises. I have had them ringing in my ears ever since I came to Inverness."

"You had better introduce him to Mrs. Dunleith," said Bella somewhat spitefully, as she rose at last and intimated it was time to return. "Perhaps they would make a match of it."

"Improbabilities do sometimes attain the region of the possible," he answered, offering me his hand to assist me in rising. "But in this case, Miss Bella, I feel doubtful. The Laird is too quiet and sedate for Mrs. Dunleith, I'm thinking; and he is at present engaged in singing 'My love she's but a lassie yet!'"

Bella looked at him sharply, an expression of annoyance on her usually good-tempered face. "What do you mean?" she said.

"Oh, nothing," he said, with well-acted indifference. "Nothing, I assure you. Only I heard him *chanting* (really that best expresses his views on time and melody) that air as he walked along the banks of the Canal the other night. I don't often deny myself a whim or fancy," he added coolly, "but it was with great difficulty I refrained from pitching him into the water by way of cooling his ardour, or assisting him to make up his mind about the 'lassie.'"

"Why do you dislike him so?" asked Bella.

"Why?—Oh, really I can't tell. Perhaps because he is always quoted as an example of perfection, perhaps because he has always been praised, and I have never met with anything but blame and discouragement—perhaps because he is rich and I—poor. Oh, there are a hundred reasons, for I candidly own I do dislike him. But chief of all I think it is because he is so overpower-

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ingly, stolidly, steadily good. If he only had a weakness, a vice that one could get hold of and say, 'Ah, now you are on a level with your fellow men,' it would be such a satisfaction !"

I had been silent all this time. Douglas Hay was walking by my side. Now and then I glanced at the handsome profile. Now and then too he would meet my eyes. The sky had grown bright for me again, the day fair. I told myself he could not have cared so very, very much for Mrs. Dunleith's society, or he would not have left her, would not have hurried to overtake us, would not have seemed so glad to see me again. We had not met since that eventful Sunday when I had got into disgrace for walking with him.

"By the by, Miss Lindsay," he said, suddenly turning to me. "Was your grandmother very angry about our walk ?"

"Yes, very," I said. "She thought I had done something sinful."

"So you had," said Bella. "And I wonder at you, Douglas Hay, tempting the lassie to do such a thing. You knew better if she did not."

"I am rather fond of shocking people's prejudices," he said laughing. "And I don't hold with the views you Kirk folk take of the Sabbath. They are altogether wrong and foolish. Miss Lindsay and I are quite agreed on that point."

"Bella knows that," I said quietly. "We have had many discussions on the matter."

"Still," said my cousin, "one has to submit to the opinions and habits of other people. I'm not saying that it is wrong to go for a walk on Sunday, but no one here would do it, and it leads to talk, and offends folk, and so it is just better to give in."

"I daresay you are right there," said Douglas Hay, "and I will not ask Miss Lindsay to offend again. All the same," he added, lowering his voice so that only I could hear what he said—"All the same I consider I have been defrauded of my anticipated privilege in taking you to the Islands. What shall I do to make up for it? Have you been up to *Tom-na-Hurich* yet?"

"No," I said, colouring slightly, as I wondered what Bella would think of this new suggestion.

"Well, let us go there, let me see—Tuesday—Wednesday—Wednesday will suit me. Can you manage it?"

"I don't know," I said doubtfully. "Perhaps Grannie may not be willing."

"You needn't ask her."

"Oh, I must. I couldn't go off walking with you and not tell her about it."

"Perhaps Miss Bella will help us," he said audaciously. "She is too kind-hearted to refuse."

Bella laughed. "You're a young scapegrace, Douglas, and you know it, and I'm not sure it's right for my cousin to be with you at all. If she goes I shall have to play chapcron."

"Do," he said eagerly, "and that will settle the question at once. You can go out together as you did to-day, and I will meet you. There—that's settled. And now I'm afraid I must leave you. I'm late as it is, and my father won't be in the best of humours. Good-bye, Miss Lindsay. Wednesday three o'clock. You won't forget?"

CHAPTER X.

FIRST LOVE.

"Oh, where—tell me where did your Highland laddie dwell?
He dwelt in bonnie Scotland, where blooms the sweet blue-bell,
And it's oh! in my heart I lo'e my laddie well."

"I don't approve of it," said Bella, "and I'm not sure I ought to countenance any such proceedings, but I know you're a wilful bit of perversity, and I suppose if you have made up your mind to go to *Tom-na-Hurich* with Douglas you'll do it."

"Certainly, I will," I made answer.

It was the Wednesday appointed for that excursion to the "Hill of the Fairies" and Bella, true to her word, had come round for me a little before the appointed hour.

The day was lovely. Indeed I had been singularly fortunate in my experience of weather since I had come to Scotland. Warm, bright, windless; the sky a pale, soft blue flecked with drifting clouds, the scent of roses and fresh grass in the air, fair and fertile valleys where the barley and the oats were quickly ripening—the pale glimmer of waters as canal and river came into view. I

felt the blood dancing in my veins. I drew in great draughts of that sweet, pure air. I was glad, without questioning any reason for my gladness, and my spirits rose to wild excitement as I walked by Bella's side to the trysting place.

Douglas Hay was there awaiting us, sitting cross-legged on a stile and smoking a cigar.

I suppose there are times and seasons when the old proverb about "two being company" does not hold good. I know I was perfectly happy only to feel his presence—only to know that pleasant consciousness that I might look, laugh, speak to him when I felt inclined.

Alone I might have been embarrassed, with Bella there I was quite happy and quite natural. The two amused me very much. I thought Douglas Hay the least Scotch of any of the Scotch folk I had met. His accent was refined, his manners, looks, gestures, all singularly free from the idiosyncrasies I had noticed among the people to whom I had been introduced. I happened to say something of this to him, and considerably roused Bella's wrath by so doing.

"It's just an affectation," she said—"mimicking the Southern tongue and the Southern manners as if his own weren't good enough for him. All the best Highland folk and the heads of the great clans keep as Scotch as Scotch can be. They're proud of their country and their descent, and well they may be. Look at the MacIntosh, and the MacGregor, and the Morays, and the Argyles, they're not ashamed of accent or manner, or anything that marks the Scotchman in their descent."

"But I'm not of a great clan or a great race," said Douglas Hay, "and so I have no reason to be proud of an accent or affect one."

"Oh!" said Bella, "I know it's your own ambition to be thought English."

"And why not? They're very good folk in their way—less characteristic perhaps than ourselves and not so amusing, but I like them and have always liked them. Do you think the two races very different, Miss Lindsay?"

"Yes," I said frankly, "why, I should scarcely have believed that a people so near to each other and so closely related could be so different. As a rule the Scotch are very proud of their nationality, are they not?"

"Most certainly they are. Nothing offends a Scotchman more than to be taken for English."

"They are far more hospitable, warm hearted and witty, too, than the generality of English people," I said.

He laughed. "Is that how they appear to you?"

"She is quite right," said Bella warmly. "They are very genuine, and have no affectations."

"I'm not finding fault with them," said Douglas.

"They are good enough folk, and bad enough too," he added in a lower tone. "But with all their virtues there is a want of refinement about them. They are stolid—sensible—clever, I grant. But also they are bigoted, self-opinionated, narrow-minded, and money-loving. It is a proverb that a Scotchman succeeds in everything he undertakes—but the main reason is not that he is cleverer, or clearer-headed, but that he is more obstinate, more frugal, and more persevering. Then socially he is less exacting and less extravagant, and comes of a hardier and more matter-of-fact race. There is little sentiment in him, but much shrewdness and no false pride. His religion too is such a personal matter that it is associated with every detail of daily life. He says, 'Heaven will help you if you help yourself,' and he *does* help himself—to the best he can get, and with an eye to the main chance. He is always practical and never idle. There lies the great difference between them and the Irish and the English. There is not nearly so much misery and poverty in the large Scotch towns as in those of the sister countries, though there is just as much vice and wickedness."

"What a pity," I said with a sigh, as I looked round at the beautiful scene, "that there must be wickedness in the world. I wonder God couldn't have made it without."

"You're surely not going to say now that God created sin into the world!" exclaimed Bella in horror.

"She could quote some of your own favourite texts for her argument," said Douglas Hay, laughing at her shocked face. "For instance—'Without Him was not anything made that is made!'—and again——"

"We will have no religious discussions, if you please," said Bella with dignity. "I don't know who is worst at that—you or Athole. She drives me just wild with her '*whys*' and her '*wherefores*.'"

"A Scotch person should never object to religious discussions," said Douglas gravely. "That is one of their virtues, perfect acquaintance with the Scriptures. You know very well, Miss Bella, that our folk discuss theological subtleties, or quote and misquote texts and passages from the Bible as familiarly and naturally as other nations talk of a new play, or a new book."

"That may be," said Bella. "But I'm not fond of doing it. I've no desire to have my faith shaken and my mind confused."

"A cemetery is a very good place for such a discussion," said Douglas Hay. "Here we are at last, Miss Lindsay. You see how the path is cut round and round the side of the hill. What do you think of this as a spot to lay one's bones to rest?"

I looked round with unconcealed interest. I thought I had never seen so picturesque and lovely a place. The winding paths, the lovely green of foliage shadowing the marble and granite, the vivid hues of flowers, the wonderful peace and stillness breathing like a blessing over those who lay in Death's long sleep below the green turf.

A strange sadness and melancholy crept over me. "It is most beautiful," I said. "How different from most burying-grounds."

"Yes," said Douglas, "I often wonder what made them think of turning it into one. As I told you before, I do not ever credit my countrymen with anything like sentiment, or fine feeling."

"Perhaps," I said, "they feel it, if they do not show it. I have known a great deal of sentiment sometimes underlie a very rough exterior."

We were standing looking at a tomb smothered in roses, and fragrant with heliotrope and verbena.

I pointed to the name and date. "Just my age," I said.

"You must not get melancholy," he said quickly. "I was thinking it was not a very lively place to bring you to."

"Oh," I answered eagerly, "as for that, it does not affect me in the least. I have always had rather a fancy for visiting burial-grounds. But no one could possibly associate this place with death. It makes one only think of rest and sleep, and the peace we all speak of so often. I wonder if we are ever to know it?"

"You mean," he said very softly, "the peace that passeth understanding."

"Yes" I said.

"And is it not strange," he went on speaking rapidly, but in the same low key, "that all this day, every step of our walk here, that has been my own feeling—perfect peace, perfect rest, perfect happiness? It was enough just to know you were beside me, just to feel your dress sweep my feet as the wind blew it from time to time, just to hear your voice—it is such a sweet low voice, Athole—speaking a chance word, or know I need but look down and I should see your soft eyes looking back to mine. You—you are not offended?"

I was listening like one in a dream. We were quite alone there. Bella had strolled on, and was out of sight. I heard only the rustling of the boughs overhead, the hum of a bee among the white roses, the quick beating of my own heart, afraid of its own new gladness.

"No," I said at last, "I am not—offended. Why should I be?"

His face flushed, the blue eyes looked at me as I had never seen them look.

"I suppose," he said humbly, "I have no right to say such a thing. No right to tell you that I fell in love with you at first sight, but it is the truth I am afraid. I, who never cared for any girl—or woman either, who only thought of amusing myself—and—now—why, I can't get you out of my head, morning, noon or night. How pale you look, I—I hope you are not angry. It is not likely that you should have thought of me—that you should care even a little. I—I can't understand it myself. To fall in love has always seemed to me more or less of a misfortune. And now—I have done it."

It was rather strange love-making. It certainly was not a bit like what I had always pictured and dreamt of, but to me it was as sweet as any words could be, as true as any truth could make it.

"I should not have said so much, I suppose," he went on, "but I am rather impetuous I fear, and you—well, I seem to know you so much better than our short acquaintance warrants. I suppose it comes of thinking so much, and fancying so much about you. Are you vexed, Athole?"

I shook my head. I could not speak, but I longed to hear him go on speaking.

"You are not vexed? I—I hardly dare ask any more. It seems too much to expect that you should have thought of me as I have done of you, that I should have filled your heart as you filled mine. You gave me back some of my old belief in the purity and innocence of womanhood—a belief I had lost, Athole, in a sharp and bitter experience. I lost all the faiths and sentiments of youth long ago. Perhaps some day I may tell you why. Now—well now I only want you to look at me and say you—you care just a little, for the graceless ne'er-do-well who has been so abused to you. Won't you look at me, Athole?"

For an instant I stood irresolute, my eyes fixed on the white marble which told that Effie Gray, aged seventeen, had "passed into rest."

Passed into rest! Mentally I repeated the words over and over again. How short a life . . . and now—rest. Had she wanted it? Had she sorrowed—suffered—loved in those seventeen years? Had someone wept for her? or did someone come now to weep where the white roses bloomed, and the bees hummed amidst their fragrance?

So ran my thoughts as I stood there in silence by Douglas Hay's side, unable yet to look at those eloquent eyes—to give any answer to his love.

He sighed, and half turned away.

"You will not look—then I have offended you. But won't you even say you forgive me, Athole?"

Then something altogether strange and mastering, and passionate, and sweeter far than any feeling or emotion I had ever known, swept over me like a wave.

I looked up. I felt the tears throng hot and swift to my eyes, and the tumult in my heart made me faint and giddy.

"Oh! my darling!" he cried, fiercely—eagerly, with triumph and yet fear in face and voice. "You love me—you love me—say it, Athole, say it!"

But I could not say it. I could not speak. His arms *were round me*, he lifted my face to meet his eager gaze—*his lips touched mine*
 Oh! Douglas—Douglas, my only

love—the first love of my life, why was not fate kind to us then—why did I not die in your arms, knowing you true—believing all your love was mine ! asking no more—desiring no more ; content—at peace—at rest !

CHAPTER XI.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES.

“ But had I wist before I kissed,
That love had been sae ill to win.
I’d locked my heart in case o’ gold
And pinnd it wi’ a siller pin !

AFTER that kiss, those hurried words, my whole brain seemed confused and bewildered. It was all so sudden, so wild, so strange. I was scarcely conscious even of how it had come about, of the fetters of iron that this interview might fasten round my life.

His words rang in my ears. The blue sky grew misty and indistinct. I had heard of love and happy lovers, had dreamt and wondered if in my own life one would ever come to woo me from dreams to reality. And now—now it had happened, really happened, and I was utterly bewildered by the suddenness and strangeness of it all.

Douglas’s voice roused me at last.

“ Had we not better follow your cousin, sweetheart ? ” he said. “ You look as if you would dream here for ever. I wonder if you are happy, as happy as I am ? ”

“ I don’t know how happy you are,” I said, looking shyly at the handsome face, “ but I know for myself I am very, very happy.”

“ Then why did you look so grave ? ”

“ I was trying to realize what had happened. It seems so strange that you should care for me. I am not pretty, or clever, or—fascinating, like your friend Mrs. Dunleith.

A shade crossed his face. “ Don’t speak of her, pray,” he said hastily. “ It is just because you are so different to the other women I have known, that I love you. And don’t think I am at all a good fellow, Athole. God knows I’m sorry now for my experience, but perhaps, without it, I could not have appreciated you.”

I was silent. Those words pained me, although I but

half understood their meaning. Into my love, as yet, no jealous fear or pain had entered. But the day was to come when the shadow of my lover's past was to fall darkly and terribly over my life; when to me, as to all women, that knowledge of the wide, wide difference between the love a man brings to a woman, and a woman gives to a man, would strike sharply home, and destroy at once and for ever my dreaming peace, my innocent faith, my perfect trust.

We walked on together, and presently came in sight of Bella.

"Don't say anything to her," said Douglas hurriedly. I looked at him in momentary wonder.

"Oh, no, I *could* not," I said.

It seemed impossible to me that I could speak to anyone of this strange, sweet secret. To share it would have seemed a sort of sacrilege. I was perfectly content to know that Douglas loved me—to dream over his words and looks, and the strange and subtle sweetness of my own new emotions, but I could not have spoken of them even to him.

"I must see you alone again," he went on, laying a detaining hand on my arm to keep me out of earshot of my cousin. "Where can you meet me? This is such a beastly place for spying and gossip, one has to be careful. Stay, I know a place. I will write and tell you. Promise you will come."

"Oh, yes," I said gladly, "I will come, if I can possibly get away. But Grannie generally has a nap in the afternoon, she never minds my going out then."

He pressed my hand, and we walked on to join Bella.

"Have you been studying all the epitaphs?" she asked, as we reached her.

"Yes," said Douglas, mendaciously, "and I have been telling your cousin stories of the witches and warlocks. But she has no superstition, despite her Scotch blood. By the-by," he said suddenly, "would you like to see a witch—a real witch? I know where one lives, and I'll take you if you like."

"Will you really? I should like it above all things."

"Now, Douglas Hay, I'll have none of your mischief," said Bella gravely. "My cousin's but a wee, weak thing, and we're all responsible for her. I'll not

have her frightened out of her wits for anybody; and I know where you mean to take her. It's to that 'Auld Wife o' Cawdor,' as folks call her, who lives in the cave near Craig Phadric."

"You're quite right," he said coolly. "She's a great friend of mine, and a very harmless old lady too, though she does a little in the way of prophesying and 'charm-selling' occasionally, and is the owner of a black cat. Would you be frightened to see her, Miss Lindsay?"

"Not I," I said, laughing, "I am not a bit afraid, as I told you before."

Our eyes met. What I read in his would have banished any fears even had I been of the most timorous disposition; but happily I was not.

Douglas rattled on after this in wild spirits, utterly ignoring Bella's hints that mirth was unseemly in a burying ground.

"You'll be telling me the dead folk know we are here," he said. "By the-bye, Miss Lindsay, I'll tell you a story of an old Scotch soldier I know. He has seen a lot of rough service, and left many companions in arms on the battle-field. He was telling me of a 'brush' they had had in India with some sepoy, and that a friend of his, Sandy MacDougall, had his head cut off clean by one of those black fellows. 'And I'm wondering often,' he adds, 'whether he found it, for, of course, on the Judgment Day he must appear wi' it, and I am thinking he'll just march up as cool as he went to that battle, *carrying it under his arm.*'"

"Certainly, your people have the queerest ideas respecting the Judgment Day I ever heard of," I said, laughing. "What on earth should we want with material bodies, with all their necessities and defects, their deformities and weakness?"

"I confess I don't know," said Douglas, "but it's a rooted belief here that we shall 'enter into glory' with them. It's a good thing," he added presently, "that funerals are more decorously conducted than they used to be. My father has a story of the burying of a certain Laird, whose coffin did not reach the cemetery for a fortnight after it had started."

"But why?" I asked curiously.

He laughed. "Oh, too much hospitality," he said.

"The relations and friends had to keep their *spirits* up; I suppose, then it was a case of 'like to like.' They did not get on very far at a time, and had to rest rather frequently by the way-side, but at last the matter was accomplished."

"You need not be telling the child all those things," said Bella rebukingly. "Such customs belong to the past. They never have such scenes now-a-days; you must go to Ireland for that."

"The Scotch are much more temperate than they used to be, are they not?" I asked.

"Well," said Douglas, reflectively, "we won't be too sure of that. They *seem* so. But I have my own ideas on the subject. They're very fond of their native beverage. It may be a sin to do any manner of work on the Sabbath day. I never heard—even in a minister's family—that it was a sin to boil the kettle for toddy!"

We all laughed. We were descending the hill now, and Bella was again in advance. Douglas bent to me. "I suppose," he said hurriedly, "you wonder I can laugh and jest, and all the time my heart so full of you."

"No," I answered gravely, "I am very glad you are so natural. It seems a little strange to believe it all yet."

"It shall not be strange long, sweetheart. Oh! to have you to myself for one hour—one hour. When is it to be? Not really till to-morrow. Could you not stroll out to-night, to those meadows beyond Craig Bank. I would wait for hours on the chance of seeing you."

"Oh, no," I cried, startled by his impetuosity, "indeed I could not leave."

"I wish I had not offended Mrs. Lindsay," he said regretfully, "I am always acting on impulse and then regretting it. If I could only make some excuse to call. I suppose now Kenneth is always dropping in."

"But he is a relation," I said.

"So am I—in a way. A sixteenth cousin or something. Well, Bella is waiting—won't you try to see me this evening?"

I shook my head. The proposition was tempting, but hazardous.

"I could not manage it, really. You must wait till to-morrow afternoon."

"An eternity" he sighed. "Oh, why can't Bella go

on? I must kiss you. I can't let you go from me like this."

I drew back, abashed and colouring. "Please not," I said. Somehow, though I could not explain it to him, I wanted to keep the memory of that first kiss sacred for that day. No other, so it seemed to me, could ever be quite the same.

"You shy little thing. Not that I would have you different, sweetheart. God forbid! Well, good-bye, we must join your cousin, she is looking back for us; say 'Good-bye, Douglas'—and yet, no, not that; it sounds ominous; I wish the word need never be uttered between us—say 'till to-morrow, Douglas.'"

And very meekly and obediently I responded, "Till to-morrow, Douglas."

CHAPTER XII.

DAY DREAMS.

"O white's the moon upon the tree,
And black the bushes on the brae,
And red the light in your window-pane.
When will ye come away?
O see the moon is sailing on
Through fleecy clouds across the skies,
But fairer far the light I know,
The lovelight in your eyes."

"You mustn't be letting yourself think too much of Douglas Hay, little coz," said Bella, as we went on to Craig Bank, after bidding my lover good bye.

I felt the colour spring warmly to my face. Would they never give up warning and setting me against him.

"What makes you say that?" I asked.

She looked very wise.

"I know him and his ways, and you don't. I have told you before he's just a fearful flirt, and I can see he's trying it on with you, just as with everybody else. The wind that blows is not more fickle and uncertain than Douglas Hay."

"My dear Bella," I said, somewhat impatiently, "I wish you would give up speaking about him. You've never a good word to say, and yet to his face you are all that is pleasant and friendly."

"I've known him since he was a lad no higher than

that," she said, holding her hand a few spans from the ground; "so it would look odd if I was not civil. But with you it is different."

Yes, I thought to myself, very different. But I did not feel the least inclination to take her into my confidence. It was very hard though to hear Douglas Hay constantly abused and found fault with. How I longed to be able to defend him. How I should have loved to face them all—my hand in his—and say, "He is mine—my love, my lover. You will see he *can* be true at last."

I wonder now that I was not more distrustful—that I did not feel afraid his love for me was but a light and passing fancy—as so many of his loves seemed to have been. But perhaps I was too young then to be distrustful; that is the bitter lesson of later years taught in the school of experience. I felt proud of my love for him and my belief in him. It was all so wonderful—so new—so sudden—but it was very sweet to my heart that night.

I remember when I went to my room I blew out the candle and sat by the open window, looking over the fields where I had walked with him.

The moon was shining brilliantly in the sky; the soft air was full of scents of roses from the garden below. As I sat and looked I saw a figure afar off, leaning against the stile that crossed the footpath. I felt sure it was his figure. The moonlight showed me the now familiar Highland bonnet, set so jauntily on the soft brown curls—the strong slight form, so supple and active and graceful. Even at that distance the thought of his presence brought the colour to my face. Had he ever troubled himself to watch the light from any other woman's window—had he ever said to them such words as he had said to me to-day?

Instinctively I felt he had not. Flirt, laugh, jest as he might, surely that one look in his eyes was no pretence, but as earnest as his feeling—as fond as my heart.

It was pleasant to sit there, unseen—to watch him as he, unconscious of my observation or presence, kept his own guard over me.

Ah me! How foolish and how useless and how far away seems that time now. I wonder often can I be *the same Athole Lindsay* who sat dreaming by her case-

ment on that sweet summer night—who watched the gracious glory of the heavens with so glad a soul, so innocent a heart—to whom love came in angel's guise, with never a thought of wrong or shame or suffering to mar its beauty—who was content enough then but to know her lover was near—his thoughts and dreams with her, as hers with him?

Ah dear Heaven! to which our vain prayers rise, surely you must pity and wonder at us! The faith and hopes of youth that again and yet again are born to disappointment—the sorrows and sufferings of maturity, that again and yet again are realized—the broken idols—the futile hopes—the vain expectances!

The night grew later. The moon veiled herself behind dim soft clouds, and one by one the stars grew faint and faded slowly out of sight. The figure by the stile turned slowly away at last and, followed by my unheard farewell, passed up the pathway and through the dewy shades of copse and hedgerow, and so out of the circle of light, away from my happy, wakeful eyes.

When I woke next morning it was raining heavily. A dreary, dull, persistent rain, that gave no promise of clearing off for many hours to come.

I looked out at the sodden garden—the dripping trees—the wet, misty fields, and shivered as I looked. No prospect of that meeting if this weather continued—no hope of seeing Douglas Hay to-day. I put on a warm serge dress and went down to breakfast, feeling melancholy and depressed.

There was no enchantment in the air now. No glorious world of yesterday! The splendour of sunlight and hope seemed to have vanished together, for in all these long, wet, dreary hours I should be alone. Alone to all intents and purposes, since—even in this brief time—my world was narrowing itself to one presence, and finding out how much that meant.

Grannie noted my depression and quietude, and expressed concern thereat in many fond and sympathetic words. She put it down to fatigue, and was inclined to blame Bella for that walk to *Tom-na-Hurich*, which she declared was a great deal too much for me.

I got away from her at last, and shut myself in the

little drawing-room to practise my singing. I knew she would not disturb me there. I fear the practice was very mechanical and only served as an excuse for my solitary musings. But at least I could dream undisturbed as I softly struck chance notes, or hummed an air, or ran up a scale.

I played all the songs I had heard Douglas sing. They all had memory and meaning now. I thought of the first evening we had met. How strangely attracted I had felt—how complete had been my enjoyment.

There were many other memories now besides that first one. Every place where we had walked—the river-side—the meadows, green with the ripening barley-crops—the green hedgerows—the stile where we had met and parted yesterday. My heart was full of phantoms chasing each other with vague and foolish restlessness. I had no calm—no peace now; I wanted him again—wanted to hear his voice—to meet his eyes—to be sure that he loved me—that I had not only dreamt of those sweet words of his.

Keen pangs of fear began to tear my heart. If he had not *really* meant them—if what Bella said of him was true!

Ah, no—no! Faith was very strong in me then, and my ignorance and innocence of men and of the world gave me no real foothold for suspicions such as later years might bring. But oh—to see him again—to hear the assurance for which my heart craved. I grew impatient. I went to the window. Alas! the weather was more hopeless than ever. The rain pelted against the panes, the wind blew in fierce and fitful gusts, shaking the rose-petals ruthlessly from their stems, the loosened gravel ran in red streams down the garden paths, great grey masses of cloud shut out the sky and allowed but chance gleams of sunlight.

I shivered at the dreary prospect, and presently Grannie came bustling in—declaring I must be cold, and that old Jean must light a fire. I did not attempt to deny that I was cold—and nothing could have been more welcome, on that dreary, tempestuous July day, than the leaping flames that soon filled the wide old *grate*, and gave a new appearance of comfort to the stiff and formal room.

I took a volume of Scott's poems from the book-case, and settled myself down by the fire for a quiet read. I had but scant acquaintance with Scotch literature—though I had read largely and widely of English, French and German authors. Kenneth had taken me to task for my ignorance of Scott—so I straightway plunged into "Marmion" and the "Lady of the Lake," by way of making up for lost time.

The beautiful imagery and bold ring of the words soon arrested my attention, and I became gradually more and more absorbed in the poems. For two hours I read on undisturbed, and in rapt enjoyment of a new world and new scenes. Then a pleasant sense of peace and drowsiness stole over me. I closed the book, and closed my eyes. I forgot the rain and the wild blasts, and the disappointment the weather had brought me. I fell asleep and dreamt of golden meadows, and flowers—unlike all flowers of earth—of a hand-clasp warm on mine, and a voice for ever whispering in my ear, "I love you, sweetheart—only you—only you." Of the lucid, lovely green of birch and larch, as the sunlight filtered through their leaves—of woodland plumes, alight in the glow of sunset; and still I seemed wandering, wandering, with joyful tireless feet to some far-off and beckoning mountain-height, where the rosy clouds lay piled in masses of beauty, and the last sweet glow of daylight seemed to rest. Then the scene changed, and I was in a dark and lonely cave. The water dripped from roof and sides. A strange dull light showed me its depth and extent. My feet seemed slipping on slimy moss and dank moist floor. I felt cold and frightened, and tried in vain to follow my companion. I could see him hurrying far ahead, but I could not keep up with him, or reach him. And then suddenly a dull red glow seemed to leap up in the darkness, and a face looked out at me. A woman's face—mocking—triumphant—evil. And, lo! my lover was beside her; and, between us, the fire rose and spread—making a barrier I could not pass, and from which I shrank, trembling and affrighted. Redder and redder the red glow gleamed—fiercer and fiercer the flames roared and spread. Imploringly I held out my arms, but he never seemed to heed—for ~~those other arms~~ held him back, and that lovely

evil face defied me ; and, far above the roar of the flames, I heard her voice in its triumph and its pride : " He is mine—mine—mine. No other woman shall come between us while I live ! " And then, suddenly, and with a cold thrill of fear, numbing vein and sense alike, I saw and recognized the face.

It was that of Dora Dunleith.

* * * * *

Cold, and trembling, I awoke, and sprang up from my chair. The vivid horrors of that dream seemed still to hold me. I looked round the warm and cosy room—with the ruddy fire-flames dancing on the old-fashioned furniture—the quaint, spindle-legged chairs and tables—the worsted work and wax flowers, that were the achievements of Grannie's grandchildren, and of which she was very proud.

How safe and warm and pleasant it all looked. Yet I was trembling in every limb. I could not shake off the superstitious terror of my dream. What had it meant ? Was it prophetic ?

In a moment my thoughts flew back to the Islands—to the fallen log under the dark shade of the trees and the two figures sitting there. Again I saw the pale glitter of golden hair—the graceful figure in its grey linen dress—the large soft eyes raised, half curiously, to mine, as our brief glances challenged each other. I had never thought of her since that morning. What could have made her face so vivid in my dream—I felt angered with myself for my folly. I tried to think that "The Lady of the Lake" and the memory of Douglas Hay's "Witch o' Cawdor" had been the cause of my curious—and certainly terribly real—vision. Still, I was utterly unnerved, and in vain tried to recover my composure.

The rain was lighter now ; there were a few gleams and breaks in the dark grey clouds. I tried to convince myself that those signs were hopeful—that I might still keep the tryst of that afternoon.

As I knelt down by the bright blaze and picked up my fallen volume of Scott, I heard the bell ring.

In another moment, there came the sound of the hall-door closing—then a quick, firm step, which already my heart seemed to recognize.

Trembling—doubtful—eager, I sprang to my feet, as the door was flung open, and old Jean ushered in Douglas Hay.

To say I was amazed, is to say very little. His visit seemed at once so bold and so audacious. Scarcely had the door closed on Jean, before I was folded in his arms—my lips covered with eager kisses.

“My darling—I couldn’t keep away. It was no use trying. Hell and furies wouldn’t have held me back. You haven’t been out of my thoughts a single instant since yesterday.”

“But what will Grannie think—what will she say to me?” I exclaimed, as, flushing and joyful, and trembling in every limb, I tried to draw myself from those warm and eager arms.

“Oh! bother Grannie! I’ll get over her. I’ll swear I’ve brought you a message from the Camerons.”

“How could you have come out in such weather!” I continued, looking admiringly at the clustering curls—all damp and bright with rain—that the Scotch bonnet no longer hid.

“Why, I’m not made of sugar, child!” he said, laughing. “And I’m sorry for Scotch blood and Scotch chivalry, if they wouldn’t dare a worse thing than weather, for the sake of the lassie of their love.”

The answer was so sweet, and the lips that gave it so masterful in their claims, that I could make no response.

How proud I felt of him. How I loved him in his daring, and his boldness, and his bright eager youth.

Was there ever anyone so handsome, and so loving and so bold? I asked myself. And, having no previous experience to draw upon, was well content to answer: “No.”

I sat down in my chair by the fire, and he took one opposite to me. “For propriety, not from choice,” he explained.

Then I prepared to entertain him till Grannie should come in, feeling not a little nervous, however, as to the manner in which she would look upon this unexpected visitor.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD STORY.

"Oh, haste, O haste—the night is sweet,
But sweeter far what I would hear.
And I have a secret to tell to you
A whisper in your ear."

BUT Grannie did not come in for a long time. She was busy over culinary matters, and, as I learnt afterwards, took Douglas Hay's visit very coolly.

"I suppose he's brought some message for the bairn," she said to Jean and, satisfied with that conjecture, left us to entertain each other.

Needless to say we did that very successfully.

Douglas was no laggard wooer, and assuredly possessed none of those national virtues of caution and cool-headedness I had always heard lauded. I was supremely happy that morning. Outside, the rain beat remorselessly on the window-panes, and filmy mists and broken gusts of wind showed that the storm was in no mood to clear. But the little drawing-room was, for the time being, a region of enchantment and seclusion.

We did not speak of the future, the present was enough for us, as yet. And how wonderful that present seemed. How, again and again, we asked each other the still inexplicable riddle—"Why do you care? What could have made you think of me—love me? Anyone else would have been natural, as choice for that divine heart-gift, but not I—not you." And so on, with all the foolish happy talk and doubt and wonderment that love has ever known and ever taught.

Presently I told him of my dream, to be softly chided that even in a dream I should have learned that sin of Doubt. He was so true, he would always be so true—promises signed and sealed with that "for ever" of love, which means just as much, or as little, as each life may choose.

"Never doubt me, sweetheart. I could not cease to love you. I could not care for any other woman. I know it—I am sure of it. You fancy, because you have

heard so much against me, that I am fickle. Indeed, indeed, I am not. All men are fickle till they find the right woman. Instinct shows her to us. We recognize in a moment what we have been seeking. We are content. We ask no more of any other."

It was sweet to listen to him—sweet to believe the truth of those words—sweet to revel in the wonderment and wherefore of those first steps in love's rosy pathway. Why should we have met, why should we have cared? We agreed it was Fate—or something even kinder and holier. Some angel's blessed power that from our birth had watched over us and guided us to this supreme moment. Our voices grew lower and softer—eyes said more than speech. Heart and soul were filled with a joy almost too deep, too great to bear.

From love's divine world I drew him back to earth again.

"You promised to take me to this witch, Douglas. Did you mean it?"

"Of course, my darling, if you care to come. We will go to-morrow if you like. This rain is too violent to last. . . . You won't be afraid, Athole?"

"Afraid—with you!"

He crossed over to my side and wound his arms about me. I lifted my face to his.

"Oh, Douglas! you are *sure* you love me?"

"As sure as that I live, sweetheart."

"But—before? I am not the only one. You have loved other women—kissed them, perhaps, but I—oh, Douglas! there has been no one—no one in my life till you came to fill it."

He bent his head on my shoulder.

"Believe me, you are the first woman who has taught me love. As for the past . . . every man has to live through some experience. His nature and the world force him to do it. But the fancied pleasure is never half so keen, sweetheart, as the regret that follows after, when he knows what the love of a good woman really means, and wishes that for her sake he had been stronger and better."

I drew myself away from his arms. My heart felt pained and saddened. Already love was teaching me *that vague jealousy, that longing to know who and what*

has "been before" in the life one loves, that all women feel whenever they love

He saw the cloud and tried to learn its meaning, but I could not have put my thoughts into words.

"If you should change. If I should lose you . . ."

I clung to him in sudden terror. Already in this short time to have let my life go out to another, and that other, one of whom I knew so little. It was strange, it was incomprehensible, but all the same I knew it was only too true.

"Dearest, do not persist in saying that," he entreated. "Surely I know my own heart, my own feelings. When I saw you first, that night at the Macphersons', I knew, Athole, I should love you. When I met your eyes in the hall, all full of tears, as I came out after singing 'Auld Robin Gray' it seemed as if all my heart went out to you. Oh, darling! if I could only make you believe—if you were only as sure of me as I am of myself. . . ."

The handsome face, the eager eyes, the loving lips, who could resist them? I let myself be convinced, I gave every assurance for which he asked. We were once more happy.

Our interview must have lasted quite half-an-hour before Grannie came in to disturb us. She was quite cordial and gracious to the young man—accepted his excuse of a message from Bella to me with praiseworthy credulity, sat there by the fire with us, as pleasant and cheery as only a sweet and kindly old Scotch lady could be. Then she insisted Douglas must stay for some lunch, and bustled off to see about Jean's preparations in that line.

"It is a shame to deceive her," I said, when we were again alone.

"Shall I tell her everything then, and get a decree of banishment?" laughed Douglas.

I shivered.

"Oh no! but perhaps things might not be so bad as you imagine."

"My dear child," he said gloomily, "they would be as bad as bad could be. I have no money—no profession—*no matrimonial* advantages whatever, and I am looked *upon with extreme* disfavour among the 'unco guid' folk

of the town. What could I expect for my audacity in loving you? Not that I care for myself. But 'tis a shame that your visit should be spoilt, and it certainly would be if this were known."

I was easily persuaded. It was much pleasanter to be taken in hand and have things decided for one than to have to act for oneself. Besides, who at seventeen regards love as the prosaic portal of matrimony? It is an idyll—a dream—a beautiful vague mystery—one does not wish to analyze it, or discuss it. Only to *know* that it is ours is enough, the present is far too sweet for the future to affect it.

* * * * *

Douglas must have made himself very fascinating indeed, for Grannie actually asked him to drop in with the other young folk on the evening of the dinner-party, thereby winning my eternal gratitude, and presenting that festive occasion in a new and much more delightful aspect to my eyes. Douglas's presence would make all the difference to me. I could have hugged the dear old lady in the access of gratitude and wonder which that unexpected invitation occasioned.

I think even Douglas was surprised, but needless to say he accepted it with an alacrity and delight which must have been highly gratifying.

After luncheon he took leave of us, despite the weather. We had arranged between ourselves that we would pay that visit to the Witch of Cawdor on the next afternoon. I knew Grannie was going to Nairn to visit an old friend who was very ill. I should be free to do what I pleased, and could only hope that the weather might favour our plans and behave with more consideration than it had done to day.

My last thoughts when I fell asleep that night were of that projected visit. I slept soundly, dreamlessly, waking with that soft, vague ecstasy that speaks of peace and happy memories.

Alas! Alas! That time does not tarry long with us!

The weather had changed. The sky was clear and bright once more.

Bella came round after breakfast to see me, and we

walked round the garden, lamenting the havoc done to the strawberries and currants.

I told her that I was going to the Witch's Cave that afternoon with Douglas, a piece of information she received with great disfavour. But I coaxed her round to her usual good-humour at last, and when Grannie departed to the station at mid-day, I believe she was under the impression that Beila was to take care of me during her absence.

"It is better she should think so," said my cousin. "Not that I would be denying anything if she asked me. But she's gone off happy in her mind, the dear old lady, and if I know anything of her and of Mrs. Mactavish, there'll be such 'havers' and clacketing as never was. She's one of Grannie's pet cronies. I wonder she didn't take you with her. Oh! but she's ill, poor body."

"Grannie wants me to go to Nairn for the sea bathing," I said, pulling a half-blown rose from the stem and fastening it in my dark serge gown. "She thinks it will do me a world of good."

"I daresay she's right. But you look wonderfully better already."

"Oh, I feel quite strong and well," I said gaily.

"It's just a grand place, this," said Bella, with complacent pride in her right to sing its praises. "Where would you find the like of the air, and the scenery, and——?"

"The weather?" I interrupted. "Think of yesterday, Bella."

"It just makes you appreciate to-day all the more, you saucy bit thing. But look, here comes your gallant. Certainly he is a well-favoured lad is Douglas Hay. I'm not the one to deny it; but mind, Athole, I've not spared my warnings. Take care of your heart."

I laughed, but the colour sprang rosily warm to my face as the welcome figure approached. He looked a little put out when he saw my companion. Perhaps Bella noticed it. At all events she hastened to assure him that she was not going to accompany us on our expedition.

"It's a great deal too far for Athole to walk," she *added*. "But she's just as wilful as yourself, so I know *there's no use in speaking.*"

"It's not so far as it looks," said Douglas cheerily. "And I know a very short cut to the Cave. I found it out accidentally, and I'll take her that way. We've got plenty of time. It's only two o'clock now."

"Well, take care of the child," said Bella warningly, "or Grannie will be fine and angry with you both. And what's to become of her dinner party if anything happens?" she added laughingly.

"Do you know I've been invited on that evening?" asked Douglas, with an assumption of dignity and importance that almost rivalled Kenneth's manner.

Bella looked astonished.

"No—really? I believe you're joking! Has he been asked, Athole?"

"Indeed, yes," I said. "Grannie invited him herself."

"Oh, then you've been forgiven for your misbehaviour?" she said, regarding him with evident curiosity.

"Will that Sunday walk ever be forgotten?" he answered laughing. "One would think it was a criminal offence. I suppose, Miss Bella, you agree with the minister, who, when a parishioner told him she had the Lord's own example for walking among the cornfields on the Sabbath Day, said rebukingly, 'I do not deny that, Mary, but let me tell you that I dinna think the more o' Him for doing it!'"

"Now, now," said Bella warningly. "When you begin with your anecdotes, you're nigh as ungodly as papa. He's just stocked with such stories, and that's one of them. I'm not going to listen, so you and Athole had better be off to your Witch, and much good may she do you!"

"Is that a benediction?" asked Douglas. "You don't happen to have a charm of any sort do you, to give your cousin, so as to prevent her being spirited away on a broomstick, or some such catastrophe?"

"You're a foolish callant," said Bella, "and only that you've grown so tall and manly I'd like to box your ears as I used to do."

Then she nodded gaily, and went off down the road to the town, leaving us together.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WITCH'S CAVERN.

" Loud sobs and laughter under-ran,
 And voices unlike the voice of man,
 As if the fiends kept holiday
 Because these spells were wrought to-day."

* * * *

" My sand is run—my thread is spun—
 This sign regarvleth me."

THE way might have been long or short. To me it was filled with all the light and perfume of summer, and all the joy and dreams and delight of first love.

Douglas was in wild spirits; he told me legends and tales without end, humorous, mysterious, witty, as the case might be.

"Our old servant at home, Janet Scott, is just full of these stories," he said at last. "My childhood and boyhood were well dosed with them, and I didn't dare tell her I didn't believe them."

"Does she know the Witch?" I asked.

"Janet? oh, yes. She's great in favour with her, and many's the bottle of whisky, and bowl of oatmeal, that finds its way to old wife Garvie's retreat, I'm thinking."

"But is she really a witch, or is it just a superstition of the folk about here?"

He laughed. "You had better judge for yourself. If looks mean anything, hers are uncanny enough. She is terribly ugly. However, sweetheart, I'm not going to let her frighten you."

Impulsively I clung to his arm. How bold and strong and handsome he was. More than ever I wondered what he could have seen in me to care for. A little, dusky-haired, insignificant slip of a girl, neither pretty, nor witty, nor brilliant.

However, I was too happy to do just more than wonder. It was so plain he *did* care, so evident in every look and tone that I met or heard.

So we went on arm in arm, or hand in hand, over rough roads and pathways, climbing stiles, skirting barley fields, drinking in sweet air and golden sunshine, happy as youth and love and freedom could make us.

The way was certainly long, but I was conscious of no fatigue. I have but a vague remembrance of how we went, or by what means we seemed to come suddenly upon the Cave where the redoubtable witch had made her dwelling-place.

The entrance was concealed by bushes. When Douglas Hay pulled them aside, I saw only a dark recess, which seemed to stretch far away into vague depths of darkness. The dripping of water sounded in a monotonous patter in the distance. The coldness and dampness and gloom struck with chilling awe on my nerves and senses. I turned to Douglas in a sudden access of terror and foreboding.

"It is a terrible place. I am sorry I came," I whispered.

"Shall we go away, then?" he asked.

But a sudden shame for my momentary cowardice made me insist on pursuing the adventure. Indeed just as I stood hesitating there, a rough, harsh voice from the interior of the Cave, demanded our business, and requested us to come in if we wished.

Still clinging to Douglas's hand, I went forward through the darkness, stumbling over the rough, uneven floor, hearing always that monotonous drip-drip of falling water. At last a dull light came into view—the gleam of a peat fire, by which a solitary figure crouched, stretching lean and withered hands to the blaze as if for warmth.

"Come in, ye whaup, come in," crooned a harsh voice. "Ye will na think that I dinna ken ye, and the leddy too. Sit ye doon, baith o' ye. It wass a prood day for auld wife Garvie when the Southron leddy cam' to her, and it's muckle she could say aboot the twain o' ye."

There was a rough, wooden bench near the fire, and to this Douglas led me, while his cheery voice answered back the old woman's greeting.

As my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, I looked at her with increased curiosity. A wrinkled, weather-beaten face, gnarled and brown as a tree-stem. Wisps of grey hair straying from a not over clean "mutch" or cap. A garb which seemed composed of any scraps and ends of tattered clothing, man or woman's, that she had been able to collect—fierce-looking, dark eyes, that *gleamed redly in the fire-light*—altogether an ill-favoured and repulsive specimen of feminine humanity.

"I've brought ye a present, wife," said Douglas presently, as he produced a flask from an inner pocket of his coat. "Something to keep the cold out of your bones."

"Ye were aye a gude callant," muttered the old woman. "And who should ken that better than Meg Garvie, who held ye in her arms your birth nicht and your puir, young mither nigh giving up the ghaist? But it's a sair fortune for ye, lad, and an ill day for the lass that may love ye. Ye've no' the face nor the luik that brings gude to maid or wife. Many's the time I've tell't ye so."

"Come, come, old wife. None of your ill omens to-day," laughed Douglas. "You'll be frightening the young lady, and I wanted you to cheer her up, and tell her some good of her future whatever may be your opinion of mine."

The red eyes flashed suddenly and searchingly upon my face. Then the old woman began to rock herself to and fro, every now and then indulging in a sip at the whisky-flask, while she crooned away half to herself, half to us, the following mysterious jargon:—

"Ill fa's the fate when the young and the auld match together. Ill for the lass is the love o' the lad that woos her sae young and sae trustful, and ill for the lad is the fierce, wild love that he woke wi'out thought, and won wi'out care, and that follows him into the future. Shadows, shadows, shadows, dark and ill and many, they lower o'er twain and three; and ill-faured and fearsome the fate o' the braw wooer and the lass that he loves. Faith will na' hold and trust will na' stay. Dark fa's the clouds o'er the Bridal Day. Pale is the bride and tearful her ee. Gane is the bridegroom she dreamt there to see. . . . Faith is nae fause, but loving and loth, the Laird and the leddy hae plighted their troth."

I looked at Douglas, only half comprehending the muttered words in their queer accent and occasional lapses into Gaelic.

He was writing them down with pencil and paper, and I afterwards made him give me a copy of them.

"What does she mean?" I whispered.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, do not pay any attention," he said hurriedly. "She's not in a good temper to-day."

The old woman, still rocking her withered frame to and fro in the fire-light, looked in a stupefied, bleared way at us both.

"I hear ye, Douglas Hay," she said suddenly. "And ye ken weel that's it's nae truth ye're speaking. Many's the time, ye idle, laughing, graceless callant, that I've prophesied to ye the fate I foresaw. Ye love too often and too easy to love well and truly, and many's the broken heart that ye ken of—and will ken again——"

"Hush, hush, wife, speak fair," interrupted Douglas. "I'm not so bad as ye pretend to think me. You'll be frightening the young lady, and indeed, I'm sorry now I brought her, seeing you're not well-disposed to either of us to-day."

"Ye maun not think that, Douglas Hay. I've no forgotten ye, a bit bairn that greeted so sair in my auld airms, and the dead mither in the Kirk-yard. But there's the black mark i' your line and your race, lad, and ye'll no escape, try as ye may. There's ill bluid betwixt fayther and son, and it will aye stir and burn i' your veins, and wax hotter and fiercer till wrath and evil shall spring from it, and hame and country shall ken ye nae more."

"Oh, come away, come away," I cried in sudden terror of all these horrible prophecies. "Don't listen to her, Douglas, don't. Let us go home. Why, oh, why did you ever bring me here?"

The tears were running down my face. Tears of terror and grief, the like of which I had never known. The darkness and gloom of the Cave seemed closing round me, the air felt stifling and oppressive.

With a sudden effort I tried to draw my lover away from the horrible place, away to where the green, sunny world of wood and sunlight might banish these horrors. But suddenly my strength seemed to fail. My feet refused to stir. Something of the feeling that oppresses one in nightmare seemed to stifle and surround me. I gave a faint cry, a gasp for breath, as the black darkness seemed to close around.

I remember no more.

* * * * *

When I recovered I was lying on the grass, supported by Douglas's arms, my face and hair wet with the water *he had brought from the spring* near by.

I struggled to my feet, feeling ashamed of my weakness, but the terror of that scene was still upon me, and I looked round afraid I should see that horrible face again, and the evil gleam of the red eyes as they watched me.

"Don't look so frightened," entreated Douglas. "She won't molest us here. Oh, darling, I'm so sorry I took you there. I never dreamt she would be in such a diabolical mood."

I clung to him, faint and speechless. It was something more than mortal fear that chilled my heart and froze my blood and left upon me from that hour the dread of impending evil, the certainty that some dreadful fate was in store for me, and that my lover would share in its sorrow.

I did not tell him so. I only clung to him, helpless and sad, listening to his cheering words and trying to believe them, but sure, with an inward certainty that defied explanation, that evil days were in store for us, that the beauty of our love-dream would be only equalled by its brevity.

Slowly and wearily I retraced my steps. How different the way looked now.

I think the impression borne in upon my mind, then and for ever, was the impotence of human will against Fate. Something had come between my lover and myself—warning—omen—premonition—call it what you will, but I could neither reason against nor overcome it. We should never be happy—we should know no sweet smooth stream of wedded love over which to float our frail bark of happiness, and all his cheering words and loving speeches were of no avail. Heavier and heavier grew my heart as we neared home, and there rang in my ears unceasingly the ill-omened words of the witch, "Ye love too often and too easy to love well, and many's the broken heart that ye ken of—and will ken again."

It was the same story again, the story everyone had told me of Douglas Hay, and which I would not let myself believe. Swiftly as my love had sprung to life, yet I knew in my own heart it was a very deep and real thing to me. It meant everything—everything.

A summons had come and my spirit had flung wide its doors to answer it—childhood and girlhood had fled away, and love had been the birth-kiss of womanhood.

But of such feelings I could not speak. They lay too deep—their joy so nearly touched the border line of pain, and the shadow of Love's wings seemed solemn and mysterious as Death as they stretched over my life and folded me in their close embrace.

Perhaps Douglas grew weary of his efforts to rouse me—perhaps he wisely thought it was best to let my mood have its way, for gradually he ceased to speak, and in silence, and now no longer hand in hand, we crossed the hills and meadows to the old stile that had become our trysting place.

The sky was growing overcast and heavy. It was close on sunset, but the clouds in the west were dark and violet-hued, and only a faint line of gold edged their glories.

"I wish I could cheer you, sweetheart," said Douglas, tenderly. "You look so sad and so wearied. I shall never forgive myself for taking you to that old hag."

I tried to smile and reassure him, but I know I echoed his wish with all my heart.

Suddenly he started.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "I quite forgot I'm engaged to dine at 'The Rowans' to-night—I'll never get there by seven surely."

A little jealous pang shot through my heart. I hated to think of his going there—of the fair woman whose tall, lithe grace had so impressed me. And she would have him all to herself, and I should be alone the whole long evening.

He looked at me. "Why what is it, little one?" he asked in surprise perhaps at my face. I had not yet learnt to mask my feelings.

"I wish—I wish you were not going there," I said timidly.

"Why—whatever objection can you have to Mrs. Dunleith? You never spoke to her in your life."

"No," I said abruptly, "and I don't wish to do so."

"Why, sweetheart?" and there was surprise and pain also in his voice as he raised my face and made me meet his eyes. "Surely you are not jealous—jealous of that woman?"

"Oh no," I said mendaciously, "only—only—well I suppose it sounds selfish, Douglas, but I don't like to

think of you laughing, talking, flirting, perhaps, with her, and I so lonely and so miserable here to-night."

"Oh, dearest," he cried reproachfully, "you must not think such things of me. They are untrue and unkind, and—and they hurt me, Athole. For God's sake let me think one woman trusts me and believes in me. Every beat of heart and every thought of mine will be yours and with you, sweetheart. Don't you *feel* it?"

The words comforted me. I stifled the jealous pain that was so hard and cruel to bear.

But alas—cruel as jealousy is—unreasoning, torturing, vain—what love was ever worth the name that loved without it?

CHAPTER XV.

"MY HEART IS SAIR FOR SOMEBODY."

"My heart is sair, I daur no tell,
My heart is sair for somebody.
I could wake a winter's night
For the sake o' somebody.
Oh, ho—for somebody!
Oh, hey—for somebody!
I could range the world around—
For the sake of somebody."

WE parted then, and I went home, sadly and wearily enough.

Grannie had not yet returned, so I went up to my own room and threw myself on the bed. I was utterly spent and tired—and yet, tired as I was, how long the time would seem till to-morrow—what weary, weary hours had to be passed before I should see Douglas again.

I was still lying there with closed eyes and in a general condition of misery and depression, when a knock came at the door and old Jean entered.

"Mr. Kenneth is below, miss, and waiting to see ye. Will ye come down? Lord's sake, lassie, but how white and weary ye look."

I sprang up in the bed.

"Yes, I am rather tired, Jean. I had a long walk—but I'll come down. Tell Mr. Kenneth I'll be with him in a few minutes."

I made a dash at the cold water, and then smoothed *my hair, and ran down stairs to the drawing-room.*

"How do you do? I hope you're going to stay to tea?" I said gaily, as I shook hands. After all, he was better than no one, better than my own company and my jealous fancies about Douglas and Mrs. Dunleith.

He looked surprised at my unusually cordial greeting.

"Yes, I shall be very pleased to stay—if you wish it?"

I ignored the latter part of his speech, and seated myself on the low, broad window-seat from which I could see the road.

"Grannie has not returned from Nairn yet," I said, "but I suppose she is sure to be back by tea-time. It is nearly seven, isn't it?"

"About five minutes to the hour," he answered, looking at his watch before committing the indiscretion of a guess. "And what have you been doing all the day?" he asked, replacing it in his pocket. "You look rather pale and tired."

"I am tired. I've been for a long walk."

"With Bella?" he asked quickly.

"Do you suppose I'm always with Bella?" I asked evasively. "No, I did not go with her to-day, though she was here."

I had no intention of telling him where I had been, or who had accompanied me, and perhaps he saw that, for he did not pursue the subject.

"I want you to come with us to Drumnadrochit by the steamer one day next week."

"What a name," I said laughing. "Where is it, and what does one do there?"

"You go by the Caledonian Canal—it is a lovely trip. There is a famous ruin—Urquhart Castle—to be seen, and the glen itself—Glen Urquhart—is magnificent. But I hope you will see many of our famous glens and lochs while you are here. The Western Highlands are famous, you know. I went there once with a friend who had a yacht. You can have no idea how weird and wild and lovely the scenery is."

"Tell me about it," I said, glad to see him interested and inclined to be talkative. I always had considered Kenneth so heavy and hard to get on with.

He needed no second invitation, but burst into quite an eloquent description of Loch Fyne, and Loch Linnhe, and Loch Ranza; of the hills of Bute and

the craggy wildness of the Kyles, and the beautiful shores of Cowal and Cantire, and the wonders of Oban and Skye.

Listening to him I felt eager to see all these places for myself and judge of them accordingly. By *myself* I meant of course with Douglas for guide and companion. I fell to wondering if such good fortune would ever befall me, and in the midst of that wonderment Grannie arrived, tired with the long day's outing and a little dispirited at the condition of her old friend's health.

We all went in to tea, one of those good old-fashioned teas which still linger in my memory, and Kenneth was so cheerful and agreeable, that I could not help wondering at the change. He told Grannie of the projected excursion to Glen Urquhart, and she offered no objections to my accompanying them all. I believe the whole Cameron family were to go, and the day was arranged before we left the table.

As Kenneth showed no signs of taking his departure, we again adjourned to the drawing-room for some music. I sang a song or two, and then made Grannie take my place at the piano, and play reels and strathspeys and pibrochs and marches, while I talked to Kenneth.

We had no lights, but sat in the window in the clear brightness of the twilight, watching the stars come out, and the moving shadows of the trees on the white road.

My thoughts flew to my lover, and I scarcely noted what Kenneth was saying. I wondered whether he too was looking out at the soft beauty of the night, and could spare a thought to me, despite the attractions of that low-voiced, fair-haired syren, by whose side perchance he sat.

"Kenneth," I said, suddenly; "do you know Mrs. Dunleith?"

He looked somewhat surprised at so irrelevant a question. I believe he had been telling me some historical facts about Culloden, and the witch's prophecy to Lochiel.

"No," he said, after a slight pause. "I have not the pleasure. But I have heard a good deal about her."

"What have you heard?" I asked, curiously.

"Oh—that she is rich and pretty, and a widow, and *very good company*."

"*And what else?*" I persisted, as he hesitated.

"Rather fonder of gentlemen's society than of ladies'."

"I daresay she finds them more amusing."

"No doubt," he said. "No doubt—at least she acts as if she did."

"You talk," I said, abruptly; "as if—as if there was something wrong about her. Is there?"

"Not that I am aware of," he answered, looking at me in surprise.

"I mean," I said, "as if she were fast or bold—or not a nice woman. Do you think her pretty?"

"I can't say that I do. But then, I don't admire fair women."

"You have never spoken to her?" I persisted, ignoring any point in that last speech, or the look with which it was accompanied.

"Never," he said, emphatically. "But why do you take such an interest in her?"

"I saw her the other day. She is very pretty—different to most of the women one meets, that is all. And I heard that she was going to stay here for the Northern Meetings."

"Who told you that?" he asked, quickly.

"Douglas Hay," I said, colouring.

"Oh," he answered, rather huffily. "No doubt *he* would know all about her."

"Why should he not?" I asked, coldly. "That is to say, if she chooses to tell him."

"There is no reason whatever—only I should think he would be better able to answer your questions than I am."

For a moment I was silent. Then I gathered courage and said boldly, "I cannot ask him, because she is a friend of his. He does not speak against friends."

"Then you wish to hear something *against* her?" he said, quickly. "Oh, I daresay I could discover plenty, if it would be any satisfaction to you to know it."

"I am not so ill-natured as that," I answered, listening somewhat sadly to the strains of "My heart is sair for Somebody," which Grannie's dear old fingers were sending forth from the worn and untuneful piano.

"No; I don't think you are," he said, lowering his voice, "that is why I wonder at your questions."

I was silent. That plaintive air seemed to thrill me

with its melancholy and its regret—but even as I listened, it seemed that in my heart there was a new pain—a gnawing, vague jealousy, that made it ache as it had never ached before.

Do what I might, my mind would revert to that scene on the Islands. Then I wondered how she looked to-night, in what sort of room they were sitting; whether they were alone. If she looked very pretty? No doubt she did. She was just one of the women who would look well by lamplight and in evening dress—with her fair hair, her white skin, her lissom, graceful figure.

I rose abruptly from my seat and leaned out of the window—the smart of tears was in my eyes, my heart beat furiously and fast. The scent of the roses made me feel faint, and the soft air seemed oppressive. And all the time the sad soft music was sounding on and on, and sadly enough I echoed it, seeing how “sair” my own heart was for “Somebody.”

CHAPTER XVI.

“A BRAW WOORER.”

“A weel stockit mailin’ himsel’ o’ the laird,
And marriage off-hand was his proffer;
I never loot on that I kenn’d it or cared,
But thocht I might hae a waur offer.”

THE day of the dinner-party at last!

I woke up feeling that something wonderful and exciting was to happen. Jean brought me my milk with a look of importance. There seemed a stir and commotion throughout the house even at that early hour. A racket of pails and buckets—an odour of soap and soda a general slashing and cleaning, and bustle—that amused me as I listened.

I lay back on my pillow, vaguely and quietly happy. I had seen Douglas every day—I had got over my attack of jealousy—I loved him even more because of it, though not for worlds would I have told him so.

There had been no *tête-à-tête* dinner that evening with Mrs. Dunleith—several other people had been present. I need not have tortured myself with pictures of him looking back at her fair face and dreamy eyes in the

moonlight, nor passed a sleepless night wondering if she had made him forget me, or repent his choice.

However, no pain or smart was in my heart now as I leant lazily back there, thinking over all the sweet and foolish things Douglas and I had said to one another—wondering whether he would think I looked pretty to-night in my white silk frock and the scarlet geraniums I had elected to wear with it. It was a pity so many others would be there—all the Camerons and the redoubtable Laird, and Alick Macpherson. However, Douglas would dance with me, speak to me, sing to me; that was better than nothing.

At this point the noise downstairs seemed so obtrusive that I thought I had best get up and dress, and offer my services in household matters.

I threw open my window to the glorious air and sunshine. How beautiful was the world, and oh! how happy was I!

I heard Jean's voice in the little yard as I stood there brushing out my hair.

"Deed, mem," she said, "and I'm no saying the bit lassie has na' made hersel' a general favourite. And she's got a pleasant way wi' her, though she's main troubled aboot things o' the warld. Still I would gie every man and woman the due o' their actions. Though works theirselves are no' saving, still there may be grace behind them. I could wish she were mair fond o' the Kirk, and not so ready wi' her quips and her arguments. It's no just weel for a young creature to be setting herself up in judgment against her elders and superiors, and so I've aye told the lassie."

"Oh, the bairn's well enough, Jean," said Grannie, somewhat impatiently. "Ye canna put an old head on young shoulders."

"I'm nae wanting to do that, mistress," retorted the ancient handmaiden. "I'm but just desirous that the head should hae some ballast in it, but young things are aye flighty, and I'm sorry she's so taken up wi' that young Douglas Hay. Have ye no' noticed it yourself, mem?"

"No," exclaimed Grannie quickly. "What makes you say such a thing, Jean?"

"Well, he's aye here, speerin' after her, and many's the time they've met and walked together in the fields

and woods yonder. I'm no saying there's harm in it, but the lassie's a bonnie wee thing, and Mr. Douglas is no' exactly what one would call—circumspect. A callant that scarce sets foot wi'in the Kirk door, and reads week-day books—not to speak of such ill-deeds as smoking and walking—on the Sabbath Day, weel, he's no' the best company in the world for the lassie."

"No—you're quite right, Jean, and I've cautioned her against him many a time. But I did not know they took walks together. At least Miss Bella is always with them."

"Deed, Miss Bella is nae *always* with them," Jean said cautiously. "I've been told by the neebors how often they meet. I thought, mem, I would just gie ye a hint o' it. It would be a sair misfortune if the lassie lost her heart to Douglas Hay. He's but a penniless lad, and he comes of a wild and graceless stock—but he's just got that way wi' him that the lasses love, and he's main and well-favoured i' the matter o' looks."

They both went within then, and I heard no more.

I finished my toilet, laughing softly to myself at their gossip and prognostications.

What woman does not love a man the better because he is ill spoken of, or abused, or the hero of misfortunes?

And everyone abused my poor Douglas. I had scarcely ever heard a good word spoken of him; but that made no difference to me. I loved him—that said all.

I ran downstairs to breakfast with spirits in no way impaired by the unflattering comments I had chanced to overhear. Grannie did not repeat what Jean had told her about my meetings and walks with Douglas Hay. She looked grave and thoughtful, but perhaps she did not consider this a fitting opportunity for lectures or cautions.

Meanwhile I found plenty to do in arranging the little drawing-room, and filling every vase and corner with flowers and grasses.

It looked so pretty when finished that Grannie declared she would hardly have recognised it, and grew more confident as to my capability of arranging the *dinner-table*.

The hour for dinner was the somewhat primitive one of *half-past-six*. The Camerons had lent the services of

their domestic to assist Jean, and she duly arrived about five, laden with floral contributions from Kenneth.

Grannie, having done everything that she possibly could do, took herself off to her room for a rest and a nap before dressing. I therefore arranged the flowers and fruit according to my own fancy, watched by the wondering eyes of Maggie, and the somewhat doubtful and critical glances of Jean.

"Weel, I'll no say but what it looks pretty eno'," she said, when my labours were ended; "but it's a heathenish fashion for a' that. I've heard of how the godless folk of Rome and other Popish places decked their tables out, and garlanded their heads. I'm no sure it's fit for Christian folk to do likewise."

"Oh, Lord's sake, Jean," said pretty Maggie, "dinna you fash yoursel' aboot what folks did so lang syne. You're ower fond o' thinking everything evil that's no exactly the same as it has aye been. There's innocent recreation eno' to be found, but some folk will na see it. Ye're all just for discovering the image o' Satan when ye look beyond your ain porridge-pot."

I left them to their discussion and went upstairs to dress, for which important ceremony I had only allowed myself three quarters of an hour.

"I wish one knew how one looked to other people," I thought discontentedly, as I surveyed myself in the glass. I did not feel pleased. Certainly excitement had lent colour to my face, and the white silk fitted my slight figure to perfection, and the scarlet geraniums gave just the necessary touch of warmth and brightness, but the old feeling of discontent at my entire lack of personal charms was strong upon me as I turned away and went slowly to Grannie's room for her inspection.

That was flattering enough to have satisfied anybody, but I knew the dear old soul was prejudiced in my favour. Then we went downstairs together to await the arrival of the guests.

They followed close on one another's heels. First, my uncle and aunt, then the Macphersons, then the Laird, who looked remarkably well in Highland dress. His manner too, was more genial and courteous than usual. He took Grannie in to dinner, but I was seated *on his other side*, and he talked to me a great deal.

However, as his conversation was entirely about the superiority of everything Scotch over everything any other country could boast of, I did not find it particularly interesting.

He seemed to consider his nationality as a virtue in itself, and I found it less trouble to agree with him than to argue as to the accident of birthright. When the wine began to circulate he brightened up wonderfully, and I was astonished at the fund of dry humour and the quick-wittedness that lay beneath his seemingly stolid exterior.

The Laird was a very typical Scotchman, tall, stalwart, sinewy of frame, with keen eyes, and a mouth both shrewd and humorous.

He had never left his native land, never crossed the Border, or set foot in England, and he informed me he never wished to do so. Naturally, with such an experience, his insular prejudices were very strong, yet though he was proud of them, he did not fail to see their weak points, and to join in a laugh against himself, provoked by Uncle Jamie's sly hints and humorous anecdotes.

"Why should I trouble to travel in other countries?" he said to me. "There may be finer scenery, better climates, grander towns. I'm not saying there *are*, but I'm quite content with what I've seen here, and I'll take other folks' word for the advantages or the beauties of other places."

"But if you had seen them you would be better able to judge," I ventured to say.

He shook his head. "I'm very well content. Scotland may not be the best place in the world, but it's good enough for me."

He then proceeded to dilate on the charms of scenery, the wonders of mountain and glen, and loch and river.

"It would take a life-time for you to see all that is to be seen here," he said, and for the first time, I met the full, direct gaze of the keen grey eyes fixed on my face.

"And I'm thinking," he added slowly, "that I would be well pleased to be the one that will be showing it to you."

I wondered whether the speech was meant for a compliment. I know I laughed merrily over it, and

told him I felt sure I could have no better or more enthusiastic guide—if I ever needed one."

Then, at last, the welcome signal came to leave the table, and Kenneth and Alick Macpherson, and myself, set to work to clear the drawing-room from chairs and tables for the promised dance.

What a merry, happy evening that was!

How we laughed, and jested, and sang. How light our hearts and feet, how amused we were when the Laird led Grannie out and the old lady footed a reel as lightly and briskly as any of us.

Douglas and I were not much together, but a look, a smile, a word from time to time, made happiness enough for me.

I felt so proud of him. Never had he seemed so handsome—so winning—so well worth loving as he did that night. As usual, he was the life and soul of the whole party. Who could sing so merrily, dance so lightly, jest so gaily, as my Scotch laddie?

And no pang of jealousy touched my heart, no fear or dread came nigh me. Alas! had I but known it—that was to be the last night on which I and happiness were to clasp hands for many and many a weary day.

"You look altogether too sweet and bonnie for anything," whispered Bella to me, as she came to my side in a pause of the dancing. "Do you know you've fairly made a conquest of the Laird? Grannie told mother that he had almost proposed for you."

I laughed merrily—but happening to glance across the room, I saw the individual in question watching me with grave and absorbed attention.

"I am glad," I said to Bella, "that it was only 'almost.' I haven't heard stories of Scotch courtship for nothing, and I know how long it takes them to make up their mind."

"Campbell of Corriemoor is no fool," said Bella, "and perhaps he began to make up his mind a longer time back than you imagine."

Just then the individual in question came to claim me for the last reel of the evening. It astonished me that such a "grave and reverend signor" should perpetrate such folly as dancing, but he performed his national *steps and figures* with as much zeal as grace.

"You don't consider dancing sinful, then?" I asked him as the reel ended.

"I—certainly not! It is a pleasant and harmless exercise. I'm not in favour of the waltz—nor do I consider it a proper or becoming dance—but no one could find objection to the schottishe or the reel—or the quadrille, as we dance it here."

"Your national prejudices are very strong," I said smiling.

"Have you none yourself, Miss Lindsay?" he asked, looking keenly at me from under his thick and strongly-marked brows. "You are as much Scotch as I am—by descent."

"So I believe," I said. "But you see, Mr. Campbell, I never lived here as you have done. I came among you as a stranger to strangers. That makes all the difference."

"I'm thinking you need not be a stranger long," he said gravely and earnestly. "We'd be glad enough to keep you with us, now you *are* here."

"Do you mean Grannie, or the nation in general?" I said somewhat flippantly. My eyes were wandering after Douglas. He was at the other end of the room talking and laughing gaily with the Camerons.

"Neither," said the Laird, gravely, "I was just thinking of—myself."

I turned and stared at him in unfeigned amazement. Was he proposing to me, or what?

"I—I really don't understand you," I answered coldly.

"We've not been very long acquainted," he explained.

"But I cannot help saying I've a great admiration for you, Miss Lindsay, and a great liking too. I know you're but a young thing—but I know too, that you've not just been what one would call happy. I'm sure I could make you so. I would like ye for my wife, and that's just the truth. Will you think it over?"

His accent and expressions had grown very Scotch in his earnestness. I listened to him with more amusement than sympathy. I wondered what Douglas would think if he knew I was receiving a proposal of marriage under his very eyes.

"*I am* much obliged to you for the honour you have *done me*," I said, "but really, Mr. Campbell, I could not

dream of accepting your offer. Indeed, I have never thought of you at all."

He looked somewhat hurt at my frankness.

"I hope I have not offended you," he said. "I fear I have spoken too soon. But will you not consider over the matter, and give me an answer? I will bide your own time. You need not hurry."

I looked at him in amazement, unqualified by any other expression. It was the one feeling in my heart.

That this middle-aged, sensible, unromantic individual could really have fallen in love with me—be seriously desirous of making me his wife, seemed almost incredible.

"Will you?" he said gently and persistently, as I remained silent.

"Will I—will I what?" I asked, rousing myself with a start from my abstraction.

"Have you not been listening?" he said in a somewhat vexed tone.

"Oh, yes, I—I beg your pardon," I answered hurriedly.

At the same moment, Douglas went over to the piano and struck up "There came a braw wooer." I could scarcely help smiling, but as I looked up at the face of my companion something in its pallor and earnestness moved me to graver thoughts.

"Does that 'yes' mean you will be considering the subject," he said under cover of Douglas's rich ringing notes.

"I am afraid it would be no use," I said hurriedly, and rather vexed at the observation our prolonged *tête-à-tête* was drawing down upon me.

"Am I so very objectionable?" he asked gently. "Old, perhaps, by comparison with yourself, but all the better able to care for and protect you. I'm no speaking hastily, or without thought, Miss Lindsay. I never cared for lass or woman yet—but I just felt my whole heart go out to ye that first night I saw ye at Mrs. Macpherson's, and I know well that I shall never care for any other lassie, now."

"I am so sorry," I said stupidly. "I really never thought, never dreamt of such a thing. But it could never be, Mr. Campbell. Don't think I'm speaking hastily or with prejudice—I like you very much as a friend, but that is all."

"In a year," he urged. "Or even two, if ye would but just gie' yourself time to think it over."

I shook my head resolutely. "No, indeed, I am sure—quite sure."

He half turned away. A sort of hysterical nervousness seized me. "The braw wooer," was still careering merrily through the phases of his courtship. It seemed all so ludicrous, so odd. I thought of Bella's jests—of our nickname—of a hundred and one things as I glanced at the broad shoulders in all their bravery of tartan plaid and flying ribbons. And he wanted me to take a year or two to *think* over his proposal! Oh! unexampled patience of the Celt!

"I suppose," he said at last, once more turning his grey eyes and grave face to mine, "I must e'en rest content. But I would like you to remember I mean this most sincerely. I shall mean it always—and if you should think better of it, Miss Lindsay, I need scarcely say you would make me very, very happy."

There was something so earnest, so deep-feeling in his voice, that it touched me more than anything he had yet said.

"As long as you are free," he went on, "I shall not despair. We are a patient race, you know, and I can be very patient, for to me love and friendship are no boy's fancies."

Then he moved away from my side, and, with scarlet cheeks and an uncomfortable sensation as of a lump in my throat, I crossed the room to the piano.

" 'He begged for gudesake I wad be his wife,
Or else I wad kill him wi' sorrow,' "

sang Douglas. He looked up at me; our eyes met. Then he ended abruptly and with no mirth or meaning so it seemed to me:

" 'I think I maun wed him to-morrow—to-morrow,
I think I maun wed him to-morrow!'

"Are you going to wed the Laird, Athole?" he asked abruptly, under cover of the closing chords. "I'm sure he's fallen in love with you, and it would be a good *thing for you*—I was thinking how selfish and inconsiderate I have been."

"Oh, Douglas," I cried quickly—passionately. "Do you regret—are you tired—sorry already?"

He heard the break in my voice—he saw the quick tears spring to my eyes. And yet—and yet—he turned away, coldly, silently, leaving me standing there gazing in blank and pained bewilderment at the open page on the music-rest.

"And I maun wed him to-morrow—to-morrow,
And I maun wed him to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVII.

DISTRUST.

"'Oh, rise my child,' her mother said,
'Nor sorrow thus in vain.
A perjured lover's fleeting heart,
No tears recall again.'

"'Oh, mother what is gone is gone,
What's lost—for ever lorn.
Death—death alone can comfort me.
Would I had ne'er been born!'"

I took a heavy heart upstairs with me to my room that night.

In some way—by some means—I had offended Douglas, and he had left me coldly, formally, just as if I had been a stranger. I tried to remember any cause for offence, but my conscience did not reproach me on any point. I could not help the Laird's attentions—I could not have prevented his proposal, and yet Douglas was angry with me. Coldly, silently angry—the sort of anger I detested. I never minded anyone getting into a good passionate rage and storming at me to their heart's content, but the sort of anger my lover had displayed, which offered no scope for explanation, and sheltered itself behind chilling ironies and huffy speeches—that I could not bear with equanimity.

I tore off the pretty white silk, and threw the scarlet flowers, now drooping and dead, on the floor. Of what use had been the wearing of grand apparel, the "tiring of my hair," the flush of cheek, and sparkle of eye, which—for once—had made me look so well, and so happy.

Douglas had not cared—Douglas had left me coldly

and sternly; had said I was a flirt who encouraged admiration, had not even *hinted* at a meeting or appointment for the next day, had not offered any opportunity that we might "make it up again."

I threw myself down on the bed and cried bitterly and passionately. The day had begun so well, it had been so happy—and now—now, how miserably it was ending. My fit of weeping exhausted me and made my head ache. Then I, in turn, became angered and offended.

If Douglas could so quickly distrust me, so easily grow cold, he could not love me so very, very much. My thoughts grew bitter, and brought up in array against him all the stories in his prejudice that I had heard so often. Perhaps he was getting tired of me already, perhaps he had been contrasting me with Mrs. Dunleith, or some new acquaintance.

In incoherent misery I ran over suggestions—hints—incidents—suspicions. After all, had not everyone warned me against him, declared him to be fickle and untrustworthy. Why should I set up my judgment as being more correct, my brief experience as more trustworthy? Just as I had reached this point, the door suddenly opened and Grannie entered.

I sprang up in the bed, conscious of flushed cheeks and disordered hair, and tear-wet eyes. The old lady came up to me with some eagerness.

"I could not go to rest, my dearie," she said, "without just a word of congratulation to you. A rare and fine piece o' luck it is, my bairn—he, so good, and so wise, and so kind, and wi' such a grand place and position. Campbell o' Corriemoor is a match to be proud of I can tell ye. And he's just daft about ye; the way he spoke, flushing and halting for all the world like a school-boy wi' his first sweetheart, and he always so cool and so circumspect. But of course he told you yoursel' eh, dearie, and . . . Why, my bairn, for what are ye greeting?"

I smoothed back my disordered hair and tried to compose myself. "Oh, Grannie, "I cried miserably, "I'm so unhappy."

"And for why, dearie? You ought to be just the most *thankful lassie* in all Scotland the night, wi' your gran' *prospects* and *braw wooer*."

Her kind arms were round me, my head rested on her dear old shoulder. I wished she had not been so confident that I had accepted my "braw wooer." I wondered if she would be very angry if I told her I had refused his suit, and scorned his manifold advantages.

"Grannie," I said wearily, "you mustn't be cross, but I'm not going to marry the Laird. I couldn't. I don't care for him one bit. I never was so astonished in my life as when he spoke to me to night."

Her arms relaxed their clasp of me. She simply stood there beside the bed—astonishment and indignation on every line of her face.

"You're no goin' to marry him—you've refused Campbell o' Corriemoor? Lord forgie ye, bairn—are ye daft?"

"Perhaps," I said despondingly. "I'm sure he's very good and kind and all that—but what does that matter Grannie, when I don't care for him? It would surely be a sin to marry a man only because he was rich and had a fine position to offer you, and all the time your heart was quite cold and indifferent. And that's just how I feel about the Laird."

But Grannie's face looked very stern and severe.

"It's just flying in the face o' Providence," she said wrathfully. "I never heard o' such wilfulness. Why cannot ye love him? He's good-looking and good-hearted, he's true and fond of you. There's never a voice can be raised against him of man or woman to say harm or evil that he's done. Ye've not so happy a home, lassie, that ye should be so quick in refusing anither, and the day will come when ye'll surely repent o' it."

I sighed wearily. "All that may be quite true, Grannie, but I cannot marry the Laird."

"Ye're sure of that?" she asked quickly. "Is there any other reason? Are ye foolish eno' to be thinking and hankering after yon graceless callant, Douglas Hay? I've heard you've been much together. But surely, lassie, ye'll no be quite sic' a fool as to listen to him! The wind that blows is not more fickle, the burn that babbles i' the meadow yonder not more shallow, or useless, or idle a thing. He wad make love to any *one just for sheer mischief or amusement, but he canna*

marry, and he kens that weel, and for all his good looks and winning ways, I'm sorry for the lass who gives her heart to his keeping."

I was silent. What use to vindicate him? What use to tell her that I *had* committed the folly against which I had been warned so unceasingly? She would only be angry and indignant. She would only rank it as a piece of youthful folly, she would only repeat, with the wisdom and foresight of age—that foresight against which youth so passionately rebels—"Of what use to love, of what use to think of him?—he cannot marry you." Just as if the prose of matrimony ever entered into the consideration of seventeen—as if it did not seem rather a drawback than an incentive to love, seeing how few married folk were lovers, and how one and all raged against the imprudence of such proceedings on the part of their respective sons and daughters.

She noted my silence and my troubled face. "Well, well," she said more gently, "I mustn't be too hard on ye, lassie. Ye're ower young to have much sense. But I hope you'll think over this matter, for the Laird's no just the person to be easily daunted, and the 'No' of a lassie has been changed to 'Yes' before now."

She kissed me in the old affectionate way. "You look very weary, my bairn," she said. "Go to sleep now and never fash yoursel' about lovers and husbands any more the nicht. Ye'll get wiser as ye grow older, and be more ready to believe in your old Grannie's advice. It's aye for your ain gude she means it."

Then she left me, and very slowly and wearily I went through the task of undressing, and laid my head on the pillow at last.

I did not sleep well, my dreams were feverish and disturbed, and among them there figured constantly the uncanny face and words of the Witch of Cawdor. I woke with a severe headache, which obliged me to spend the whole morning lying down on the couch in the little drawing-room. I could not read, the pain was too severe. I could only just lie there with the room darkened to keep out the sun, and my own miserable thoughts for company.

Grannie was kindness itself, and so was Jean, but the day was a very long and weary one for me. No message

came from Douglas Hay, and I could only conclude that he was still offended.

In the evening Kenneth and Bella came in to discuss the day for our jaunt to Glen Urquhart. Bella exclaimed at my white face and heavy eyes, but her cheery presence did me good and roused me a little from the apathy and general depression of mind and body to which I had resigned myself throughout the day. Shortly before they left, Kenneth and Grannie went into the dining-room for some refreshment, and Bella and I were left alone.

She turned to me with a sort of suppressed eagerness.

"Tell me, Athole," she said hurriedly, "did the Laird propose to you last night?"

"What makes you think he would do anything so foolish?" I asked evasively.

"Well, his manner, and the mysterious hints Grannie was giving us. He spoke to her about you I know. What a fine thing it would be for you, my dear—Mrs. Campbell of Corriemoor!"

"You had better say Queen of England at once," I said ill-temperedly, "one is as probable as the other."

"But he is fond of you, anyone could see that," she answered, "and for such a quiet, cold sort of man as he has always shewn himself, it was just wonderful to see him last night. Not but what ye looked the bonniest wee thing anyone could wish to see," she added extenuatingly.

I laughed scornfully. "My dear Bella," I said, "whatever I looked or seemed I only know this, I am not going to marry your Laird o' Cockpen—or—or anyone else," I added with a sudden break in my voice.

Bella looked at me in silent concern, and for a moment neither of us spoke. "Have you heard," she said at last, "that Douglas Hay is away to Edinburgh to-morrow morning? I met him on his way to 'The Rowans,' to say good-bye to Mrs. Dunleith."

Every drop of blood in my body seemed to rush in a passion of strength to my heart, then slowly and coldly ebb away, leaving me white and chill as marble.

Going away—going to Edinburgh—going without a word of farewell to me! What had I done—what could it mean?

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"Are you sure?" I cried faintly, thankful that the gathering darkness hid the self-betrayal of my face.

"As sure as his own words could make me," she answered. "Didn't you know? I thought he would have told you last night."

I shook my head. I did not find it easy to speak.

"From what he said," Bella continued, "I fancy he's had another row with his father. They're always disagreeing—especially when the old man's had a break-out at the whiskey, which happens not unfrequently. Douglas seemed in a tearing rage, I know."

I was silent. What could I say? How express in any words the bitter pain—the passionate indignation—the fierce jealousy raging in my heart. He could leave me like this—he, my lover, who had sworn eternal truth—leave me with no farewell—no explanation—and yet he could find time and opportunity to go to that other woman; he could tell her of his plans; he could say good-bye to *her*!

Rage and fury took possession of me. Every sweet and pleasant memory of Douglas Hay, of my brief love-dream, turned to gall-like bitterness. I lay back on the couch, my eyes closed—outwardly calm and indifferent, but inwardly raging with a fire and passion that almost terrified myself.

How dared he treat me so? How dared he?

So this was what came of believing in him! Of setting myself in judgment against the opinion of my elders, of building up my own Castle of Faith in defiance of all warning—of thinking the world a Paradise of Love's own making—of throwing myself madly, impulsively, on the fair smiling waters of trust and happiness.

In all my life to come should I be haunted by this one failure? Should I know no other golden memories on which to lay my finger, saying—"Ah! I was happy then?"

Bella's voice sounded on—I never heeded it. Silent, stony—cold—so I lay there in the dusk of the fading twilight, feeling that, for me, all sweetness and glory of life had flown for ever away on the wings of a falsified faith!

CHAPTER XVIII.

"SOUNDING THE DEPTHS."

"Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met—and never parted—
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

A WEEK had passed.

I had not thought a week could be so long and wearisome a space of time—that into seven days and nights, a lifetime of hope, fear, expectation, anguish, disappointment, could be crammed. Yet such was my experience.

Every morning I rose thinking, "To-day there will be a letter—everything can be explained." Every night I laid my aching head on my pillow, and heard my sick heart throb out its misery in the silence, knowing hope was dying within me, that Douglas was only showing himself in the character that had been painted so often for me, and which I had so steadily refused to believe.

Why does not Love die as swiftly as it wakens? Why does not one sharp blow of distrust and wrong kill it out of the heart and memory? Why must one still go on suffering, remembering—tortured every hour of the day by hopes that will never again be realized—by memories that are too bitter-sweet to be soon forgotten?

Oh! that week, that hateful, terrible week. Never again would its marks leave me; never could I rise and face life, and look at it with the same feelings, the same faith, as did that Athole Lindsay whom I had known before the first of those fatal seven days!

Oh, men! to whom a girl's love seems so light a thing—whose young life gives itself to you as the spring flowers give themselves to the wooing of the sun, when his ardour wakens them to life—do you never think what it is you do with your careless words and fickle caresses?

You meet in later years sad women, hard and bitter women, reckless women, bad women. Be very sure that it is to one such broken faith of girlhood, one such *cruel lesson as I was taught*, that they owe that change. *Be very sure—you whose blame is so ready, and whose*

judgment so harsh—that somewhere, sometime—in the far-off remoteness of the past—they loved, trusted, hoped, and woke—to desolation.

And when all the sunshine is dulled, and all the beauty of the earth grown dark and sombre, and the sky is no longer blue, and the sunshine no longer golden—oh! then it is hard indeed to turn the same face to life, and accept it as we once accepted it; to try and patch up the broken faith and the soiled honour, and the frank and happy trust in innocence and truth.

Wearily must Time drag on its course, and sharp and heavy fall the blows of sorrow, ere life's great lesson of endurance is learnt—ere with humble hearts and patient eyes we can fold our hands and murmur, thankfully—"Peace is won at last."

Joy makes no long tarrying with us. But for even its brief flashes of sun-light we learn to be very, very thankful. Impatience and expectation are but fuel to the fires of youth. Gradually they exhaust themselves, and the fires burn with fainter, but steadier, light, till naught but ashes are left.

But, oh! it is hard, hard, hard! And who shall help us—and who shall know us—and who shall read the secret of the struggle and the vanity of effort? No one—no one. Not our nearest and dearest—not even that *one* who deems he knows us best. For though all life is lonely, in a deep and saddened sense of loneliness when it fails to find sympathy and comprehension—it descends to the very deepest depths of loneliness when sorrow touches and misfortune crushes it. None can know its bitterness, or suffer with its suffering. In all that is most sad and solemn in our lives—as perhaps even in our moments of deepest joy—we are utterly and entirely alone, living out for ourselves the Fate that is the birthright of each life, and by it condemned or blessed.

So for me went on the weary days, and I kept my secret in my heart, and did my best to be cheerful, and to accept all the simple pleasures and amusements provided for me.

We went to Glen Urquhart as arranged. The Camerons, Macphersons, Grannie and myself. The *day was lovely*. The views—as the steamer took us *through the Canal*—were like a changing panorama of

beauty. Hills and plains were bathed in the clear and quiet sunshine of the perfect summer day—there was scarcely a ripple on the water, scarce a stir of bough or branch on the wooded shores—and a faint haze covered the distant heights, and fell mistily on bush and rock and heather of the wide moorland.

A week before, and how I should have revelled in all the wild and rugged beauty that met my eyes that day! But now my heart was too heavy, and my spirits were very forced indeed, and tears were nearer to my eyes than smiles to my lips.

I have but a vague remembrance of all the places pointed out to me—of stories and legends galore related by Uncle Jamie or Kenneth—tales of Highlanders and chieftains, and great exploits and great villainies too, and many pitying comments on my total ignorance of Scottish history.

I sat there on the deck watching the changing scenes, and listening to Kenneth as he pointed out the different points of interest. The party seemed very merry indeed. Alick Macpherson and Flora were looking supremely happy. Bella was in sympathetic converse with an elderly doctor from Inverness, who had chanced to be on the steamer, and was bound for Drumnadrochit. My aunt and Mrs. Macpherson were deeply engrossed in an interesting gossip anent their friends and acquaintances. Grannie was chatting to Uncle Jamie, and giving vent to a shocked exclamation occasionally at some broad jest, or equivocal joke, on his part respecting things sacred or moral. He loved nothing better than to shock the old lady, and some of his stories were certainly calculated to do so. To me, however, they were slightly unintelligible, as he always related them in the very broadest Scotch, and I was not yet fully acquainted with the quaint expressions and phrases he so plentifully scattered abroad.

"Jamie, Jamie," I heard her say rebukingly, "when will ye learn to conduct yourself with gravity and discretion? I'm thinking ye're just demented."

I looked at Kenneth. "Your father is younger than you in spirits," I said. "You are twice as grave and solemn as he is."

He glanced with disfavour at his relative, who was

expatiating on some point of resemblance between "the de'il, a Hielander, and a whisky-bottle," which I confess I was unable to detect, and which Grannie vainly endeavoured to silence.

"Yes," he said, "we are very unlike."

"You say that as if you were more thankful than regretful," I said.

He looked at me. "Life is not altogether a jest, nor always a subject for ridicule," he said. "My father appears to consider it is. I do not."

"A jest!"—I shivered slightly even in the noon-day warmth. "Indeed no—it is very terribly earnest I think."

"You cannot surely think so yet," he said, with a quick searching glance at my face. "What can life be to you but a fairy dream—with nothing hard or sad or painful to shadow it?"

"A dream," I said bitterly. "Yes, of course, that is all. But every dream is not pleasant."

"Yours should be. You are so young, and life can't have been very hard for you yet."

"Oh," I cried impatiently, "how sick I am of hearing that I am 'so young.' It forms the basis of all the lectures and advice I am perpetually receiving."

"Don't be so cross about it," said Kenneth smiling. "It's a fault we all mend of very soon. But no wonder everyone preaches it to you, for you look even younger than you are."

"And you," I said quickly, "seem older than you look."

"That is a good fault for a lawyer. No one would trust a very young man with an important case. By-the-by, do you know I am going to Edinburgh?"

"To Edinburgh?" I echoed feebly, and with that sudden sickness of heart the name and its associations always brought to me.

"Yes. I leave directly the Northern Meetings are over, and shall stay there all the winter."

"Indeed," I said indifferently.

What did it matter to me how long he stayed, what he did? If it had been —

I broke off sharply and impatiently. I would not *allow myself* to think of him. Was he not utterly faithless and unworthy?

"I mean to work very hard," continued Kenneth, his voice very low and earnest. "I want to get on—to be independent—to make a position."

I said nothing. I only looked at the quiet power of the face that had so little youth in it—the firm lips, the serious brow—and thought that what he wished to do was quite possible to him.

"Don't you agree with me?" he went on presently. "Don't you think a man cannot begin work too early?"

"I don't know," I said vaguely. "I am afraid I have never thought about it at all. But I suppose it is better to have a definite plan, to set some object before one, and work for it. That is the best of being a man. He can afford to fling everything aside for an ambition, or project. He can work steadily on at it till he attains it. Women must bear the monotony and dreariness of life as best they can—waiting—hoping for something that after all may never come!"

"Why do you speak so sadly, Athole? A little while back you seemed so bright and full of life. Are you less happy than you were a week ago?"

"Of course not. Why should I be?" I exclaimed quickly, angered that the colour would fly to my face before the searching glance of those grave eyes.

"That is not for me to say," he answered. "Only just as you spoke you looked so very, very sad. You are too young to be enquiring into the 'why and wherefore' of life. You ought only to enjoy it."

"That," I said, "is not always possible—even with all the will to do it. Besides I am not of the temperament that accepts without question, and enjoys without effort. I am afraid I have rather a fancy for the 'whys and wherefores'—for following everything to the vanishing point. I always had."

"Then you will never be happy."

I was silent. My eyes followed the track of the steamer—the long line of churned white foam that marked its course over the placid waters. The fair green land lay bathed in sunlight, and afar off the faint hills shone whitely in the noonday glow. A sort of terror came over me as I looked at all that beauty. A terror of long years to come, when my heart would ache and long and strive for forgetfulness—but strive in vain. When

every day would be a landmark of pain in my memory. When I should vainly strive to reach some higher peace or content on the wings of my broken faith. When, for sake of this sweet Northern summer-time, all other summers should seem cold and blank.

I heard Kenneth's voice sounding on and on. I paid no heed to it—only sat there with clasped hands, and eyes that watched the shores with strained, unseeing gaze. And in my heart there burnt like flame that love and longing for some word, some sign from Douglas—Douglas who had so lightly loved—so soon forgotten me.

* * * * *

It was quite late in the evening when we returned home. I was utterly tired out—so tired that, as I stumbled into the little dining-room at Craig Bank, I forgot my usual enquiry as to the evening post. There were several letters on the table, and Grannie bent over and commenced examining them.

"One for you, Athole," she said, and handed me a square, boldly addressed envelope. I glanced at the post-mark. Edinburgh!

My heart gave one wild throb. The blood seemed to leap in a boiling flood to my brain, and for a moment the room and everything in it spun round and round in giddy circles.

Then, with a violent effort at self-command, and muttering something explanatory to Grannie about going to take off my hat, I rushed away to my room.

Breathless with joy, I looked at the envelope again. I dared not open it at once. I sank down into a chair, keeping my treasure clasped close to my throbbing heart, the glad tears rushing to my eyes.

"Oh, my darling," I sobbed, "and you did not forget after all! How could I have wronged you so?"

Passionately I kissed the paper—he had touched it—his hand had written that address. It was no mere earthly, ordinary letter to me, but something wondrous, magical; something dropped from Paradise to make the dark earth glad and bright once more.

Then I grew calmer. I dashed the tears aside, and with trembling fingers opened the envelope at last. The *letter* was not very long. With a sense of disappointment I took that fact in, even before I began to read it.

There was no formal beginning. He did not address me even by my name. This was the letter :

"I had made up my mind not to write to you at all. It would have been wiser and better, but perhaps I owe you some explanation. I have been very selfish, and you, very unwise. Why should I tie you down to my ill-fortunes and unlucky reputation? For I am a bad fellow, Athole. People have not lied when they told you that. Try and believe it, think the worst of me that you can. I should never have said I loved you—should never have stood in your light—but you are very young, and women so soon forget. Marry the Laird, Athole, if you are wise. He is a good man, if you like. He will be to you what I never can and never could be. As for me—well, my father kicked me out of his house, and I am thrown on the world to sink or swim as the case may be. I suppose I shall sink. Heaven knows, a more miserable, reckless devil never breathed on the face of this earth than the fellow who now writes these lines to you ; but in all the recklessness and misery the one regret that haunts him most, is the regret that he may have made you unhappy. Think all that is bad of him, if that will help you to forget—but think he never was worth one thought of your pure and tender heart, and you will be right.

" DOUGLAS."

The paper fell from my nerveless hands. I seemed turned to stone.

This was all. This was the reward of my love—my tortures—my trust !

How intense the silence seemed. I could hear my heart beating with slow, strange, heavy throbs.

Oh, God ! the pain—the pain—the pain. Had I ever suffered before? No ! I had only vaguely dreamt what suffering might be. Now—I *knew*.

I don't know how long I sat there. I don't know what I did, save that now and then a low moan would startle me in the stillness, and I knew it came from my lips. And yet it sounded strange and unfamiliar, as if some one else *must* be there beside me
some one else, not Athole Lindsay.

She—why, surely she was dead. Killed in her youth and happiness—killed in her love and trust. Slain without warning, without pity, without remorse.

I remember I rose, and moved feebly to the glass, and looked with a sort of horror and wonder at myself—at my ghastly face, my tearless eyes, round which the black shadows of pain and grief had set their heavy marks.

I took the letter—the cruel letter which had robbed me of all that was best in life—every word of which seemed burnt in letters of flame on my heart. I took it and tore it deliberately into fragments, and going to the open window I tossed them out to the cool night air. They fluttered over the ground, the wind carried them here and there, as far as the hopes they had scattered.

A knock at the door roused me. Mechanically I blew out the candle and commenced to unfasten my dress. The moon was nearly full, the whole room was flooded with its radiance.

“Are you going to bed, Athole?” said Grannie’s voice, and the old lady entered carrying a glass of milk in her hand.

“Yes,” I said with effort, “I am very, very tired.”

“Well then, I’ll no disturb ye. Indeed, I’m just wearying for bed myself. Drink this milk before ye lie down, my bairn, and now, good night.”

She could not see my face, she noticed nothing about me in any way strange, or remarkable. Mechanically I kissed her and answered her, and with intense relief saw her leave the room and close the door.

Then my self-command seemed to forsake me. I began to tremble with a violence that shook me from head to foot. Dry, tearless sobs burst suddenly from my breast. I felt suffocating. I threw myself on my knees beside the bed the agony of thought and feeling seemed to crush me with a grasp of iron. I stretched my arms out to the darkness. What was in me of consciousness or strength struggled in some vain appeal.

“God! Have you no pity?” my dumb lips cried.

And the silence seemed suddenly filled with voices—*fiendish—mocking—triumphant.*

"None," they echoed again and yet again. "None for you, oh mortal, rebellious and deceived—for you have chosen to worship a false god of your own making, and your worship makes your fate!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"COME UNDER MY PLAIDIE."

"Come under my plaidie,
The night's gaun to fa';
Come in frae the cauld blast,
The drift and the snaw;
Come under my plaidie, and sit doon beside me,
I'll shield ye frae every cauld blast that can blaw."

My dream had ended.

Its beginning had been sudden, so was its termination.

All through the hours of that long sleepless night I lay awake in tearless misery, battling with my shame and sorrow as best I could.

I had loved him so—and he had cared so little. He had but amused himself with me as a novelty, something to talk and jest with in idle days and hours, and I had given him all my heart—my love—my life!

I knew that so well. I knew it in the agony and self-abasement of that terrible night—a night that left its mark on me for many a year to come—a night in which I cried for death to end my misery, feeling that never again would I care to rise and face the daylight, to hear familiar voices, to see the kindly smiling faces of my kinsfolk. A night in which I drank of my cup of humiliation to the very dregs.

I had scarcely known how I had hoped even against hope for explanation or excuse of Douglas Hay's conduct until that letter had reached me. But with it all my hopes fell shattered to the ground.

I had been wandering in a world of innocent joy, but now its sunshine was dimmed, its flowers poisoned, its beauty marred for ever.

The next morning I felt too ill to rise from bed. I pleaded my usual excuse of "headache," and Grannie attributed it to the fatigues of the previous day. She was never fussy or troublesome, the dear old soul. She seemed to recognise that quiet was the best thing for me, and so I lay there all day in my darkened room, with cool

bandages on my burning head and cool drinks for my burning throat, and gradually my pulse grew less feverish, my head throbbed less madly—and the calm of utter weariness and utter despair stole over tortured brain and aching heart.

No one came near me but Grannie. I could not have borne it. Every sound, every voice jarred on my strained nerves—my only prayer was to be alone, quite alone.

* * * * *

There is no need to dwell at length upon this time. Almost every life has to go through some such crisis of misery at some period or another. I went through mine. I cannot tell whether it lasted long. It seemed an eternity but probably it could not have lasted more than that night and day, for I was up and about as usual the next morning, and to all appearance looking much as I always looked, save for those dark circles under my eyes and a little additional paleness of my never very rosy cheeks.

Pride had come to my rescue. No one knew my secret. No one should know it. I would live my life, I would travel the road before me, but I alone should know of the knife-thrust in my heart, drawing its life-blood from it with every step of that destined journey.

"Good-bye, Douglas," I cried. "Good-bye hope—good-bye youth."

* * * * *

The days passed into weeks, the summer was nearly over now. The time for the Northern Meetings was at hand. I heard of nothing else. The little town was all astir with excitement. The dressmakers had their hands full of work.

The Camerons were to take me to the first day of the Highland Games, as Grannie did not care to go.

The day was cold and showery, and I dressed myself for the great occasion with many shivers and a growing disinclination to accompany my cousins.

However, when they all descended upon me in a cheery and excitable frame of mind, scorning to see any threats in the gloomy clouds, or detect any chill in the rising wind, I was fain to appear cheerful too, and we all set out for the festive gathering.

The Grand Stand was cold and draughty, and the threatened rain descended just as the procession

of pipers appeared on the scene with their brilliant tartans and flying ribbons.

I had grown more and more depressed as the day had gone on, and I was huddled up in my corner, shivering and melancholy, as the weird strains of the bagpipes sounded from the distance. Just then a kind and familiar noise sounded close to my ear.

"Miss Lindsay, you look so cold and chilly—do me the pleasure to accept this plaid."

I half turned my head, and saw the Laird standing just behind me.

His kindly grey eyes, his honest concerned face, gave me a sense of pleasure and friendliness to which I had long been a stranger.

"Thank you," I said cordially. "There's no use denying it, Mr. Campbell, I *am* cold—horribly cold."

The thick tartan plaid was wrapped round my shoulders immediately, and the sense of warmth and comfort it brought made me feel quite genially disposed to its owner. He leant forward and chatted away to me, explaining the gyrations of the players, the names of the clans they represented, and the tunes they played in such spirited and exhilarating fashion. Bella and Flora had recognised his proximity by this time, and Kenneth had favoured him with a somewhat distant bow—they were not within handshaking distance.

The rain had now evidently made up its mind to hold off no longer, and from a scattered showeriness had settled down into a good steady downpour. The sun had finally hidden his face for the day. All over the great wide expanse of sky the leaden clouds were rolling and massing themselves in a gloomy phalanx. The wind swept coldly and cheerlessly over the open ground, and even the pipers seemed to lose heart, and the proceedings were brought to a close.

There was a stampede out of the building, the rain was dripping through crevices in the roof, and the wind blew gusty showers into the faces of those occupying the front rows of seats.

Everyone looked more or less blue and damp and dismal. The Laird kept beside me, and insisted on my still wearing the warm thick plaid.

"*How will ye be going home?*" he asked Flora, who

was looking extremely chilly and disconsolate in her thin summer dress and airy bonnet, neither of which were at all suitable to the day.

"Oh we must have a fly and pack ourselves into it," she said rather ill-temperedly.

"Then may I see your cousin back to Craig Bank?" he said. "I have a covered carriage here. It is quite at her service."

"Oh, thank you," cried Flora eagerly. "That will save us going out of our way, and will you please explain to Mrs. Lindsay——"

"Certainly—certainly," he said, cutting short her words, and regardless of Kenneth's scowls. As for myself I was too anxious to get home, to care how or with whom I journeyed.

We all parted somewhat hurriedly, and the Laird put me into a comfortable carriage and seated himself opposite to me, and through the now blinding rain I was driven swiftly home to Craig Bank.

Grannie was looking anxiously out of the window, and there was no small amazement visible in her face as she saw my companion.

He followed me into the house. A blazing fire gave us welcome in the dining-room, the table was laid for dinner. It was very pleasant after the cold and damp of the outer air.

I threw off the plaid and went eagerly up to the fire. I left the Laird to make his own explanations. Presently I heard Grannie urging him to take "pot-luck" and stay dinner.

He hesitated for a moment and then accepted, only asking if he might give his coachman the necessary orders as to going back to the stables.

I thought how pleased and radiant Grannie looked, as I slowly dragged my tired and half-frozen limbs upstairs, and removed my hat and finery for the plain dark serge of every-day life.

The soup was on the table when I went down, and the Laird, grave-eyed, solemn, stolid as ever, took the chair opposite mine.

I had not seen him since the night of his proposal. *He had left Inverness next day and been at his own place Corriemoor ever since.* I listened silently as he

and Grannie chatted on about all the topics of general and local interest. From time to time I caught the grey eyes looking at me with an intent, observant gaze.

I wondered whether he detected any change in my appearance. To me it seemed apparent enough. I had never been very brilliant at conversation, but now it seemed more of an effort than ever. When he spoke to me my replies were as brief as they well could be. His presence was another stab to memory. It brought back the night of that dinner-party—the last night I had spent with my love—the last night I had seen his handsome face, and heard the ringing notes of the voice I had learnt to love so dearly. Ah, me! how long ago it all seemed, how terribly long ago!

* * * * *

Dinner was over. The rain still poured down in a steady, uncompromising fashion, and Grannie would not hear of her guest departing.

We drew up our chairs to the fire and chatted—or rather they chatted, and I listened. The Laird seemed in wonderfully good spirits. I even found myself laughing at some of his anecdotes and descriptions. Once Grannie left the room on some errand or excuse, and I found myself alone with my quondam suitor.

A momentary silence fell between us. Then he looked at me in his direct simple fashion.

"You are not looking well, Miss Lindsay," he said. "You are pale and thin; are you minded to stay on for the winter in Scotland?"

"I have not thought about it yet," I said. "Grannie seems loth to part with me; but I don't know what my father's wishes on the subject may be."

He was silent for a time. "Perhaps the air is too bleak and strong for you," he said. "You look as white and frail as any snowdrop. I felt just horrified when I saw you at the Meetings yonder."

I coloured slightly at his look and tone. "Oh," I said lightly, "I am well enough. Pray don't regard me as an invalid. You know I was not very robust when I came here, but I think I have grown much stronger now."

"I hope so," he said doubtfully; "but you must excuse my saying that your looks are very unlike your words. And you are not bright and merry as a young
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thing should be. Are you in any trouble? If you would but let me be a friend to you—help you—it would make me so happy.”

“You are very kind,” I said, my voice a little tremulous, for something in his earnest face and kind grey eyes touched me deeply, “but indeed I am quite well, as well as I shall ever be.”

“But there *is* a trouble,” he said gently; “I am sure of it; but I cannot press for your confidence, Miss Lindsay. I have no right to it—I wish I had.”

I was silent. A feeling of embarrassment sprang up between us, and I began to wish heartily for Grannie’s return. I glanced at the window; the day was rapidly closing in, the dull grey rain and mist made the prospect very dismal.

His eyes followed mine.

“I am staying at the hotel for a few days,” he said, “I arrived last night. I suppose it is about time for me to take my leave now.”

He rose and walked to the window and stood for a moment there, looking out at the wet trees and the sodden ground. I also rose and fetched the plaid which he had lent me, and laid it on the table.

“Will you take this?” I asked hesitatingly. “Or shall I send it to the hotel?”

He turned quickly, and glanced from the wrap to me. “You have greatly honoured me by wearing it, Miss Lindsay. From this time it is a possession of value to me. I will take it myself unless—unless——”

I looked at him enquiringly, a little conscious flush rising to my face.

“Unless you would still further honour me by keeping it,” he said at last, making a vigorous effort to appear natural and unconstrained. “In memory of some slight service it has done you,” he added in a lower key.

I felt somewhat embarrassed; the plaid was a very handsome one of his own tartan, but I scarcely liked to accept it as a gift from him under the circumstances.

“You are very good,” I stammered, blushing furiously as I met his eyes. “But I—I don’t like—I mean I think Grannie would hardly like me to accept such a handsome present from you.”

“I am not asking your Grandmother’s opinion,” he

said somewhat sternly. "I only wish for yours. Will you not accept it in the same spirit in which it is offered, and for sake of—someone who cares very dearly for you, although he knows he is but a fool for his pains."

"I—I am sure you are not a fool," I exclaimed eagerly, "and certainly I will accept your gift in the spirit you offer it. It is most kind of you, and I think I should have caught my death of cold to-day had it not been for that plaid."

He was still standing by the window, his face slightly averted.

"Do you remember the old song?" he said somewhat hesitatingly. "I fear that is very much how I felt to-day. Oh, Athole, if I could only tell you how much you are to me—how gladly I would shield you from 'every cauld blast that may blaw;' every hardship, every trouble—nay, there—it is no use—we will speak of it no more."

CHAPTER XX.

"BELIEVING THE WORST."

"'Tis not the frost that freezes fell,
Nor blawin' snaw's inclemencie,
'Tis not the cauld that makes me cry,
But my love's heart's grown cauld to me."

BELLA and I were sitting over the fire. Grannie had gone to bed with a bad cold, and my cousin and I had the little parlour to ourselves.

A week had passed since the day I had witnessed the Highland Games, since the Laird had presented me with his plaid, since Grannie, staid and proper as she was, had decreed I might accept that gift without any outrage to laws of propriety.

I had seen him once or twice since then, but we had had no more confidential talks.

The weather had changed entirely for the worse. Day after day the gloomy clouds poured down their torrents of rain, only relieved by occasional wild gleams of sunshine which would burst through the riven clouds with a *mocking promise* they never fulfilled. I scarcely *left the house, for the chill I had caught had left me*

weak and languid, and the doctor Grannie called in declared I needed the greatest care.

How good they were to me, those dear Scotch folk ! What tenderness and thoughtfulness, what coddling and comfort, what petting and fussing there was over me. But now Grannie was ill herself, and Bella had come to stay with us and nurse her, and so we had been sitting cosily by the bright fire, after supper, chatting in disjointed lazy fashion as we generally did, and without the slightest inclination to go to bed, as old Jean had suggested to us a few moments before.

The steaming port-wine negus she had brought us was on the table. The firelight threw pleasant glints of brightness across the shadows. Bella leant back in the big comfortable arm-chair, and gave a sigh of content.

"If you had ever been one of a large family, Athole," she said, "you would appreciate the luxury of peace and quiet like this."

"I suppose," I said somewhat absently, "that one never does appreciate what one always has, or can have. It seems so. Now, I like brightness, life, animation about me. When everything is so quiet one cannot help thinking, and remembering."

"You're ower young for that," said Bella. "I wish you were not so grave and old-fashioned. Just for a wee while you seemed to brisk up and get quite bright and lightsome ; but you've fallen back again, and your little face looks so white and weariful at times that I am quite sad to see it. You're not happy, Athole, and I could make a shrewd guess to say why, if you would not be angry with me."

Then—why or wherefore I cannot say, but quite suddenly—all my strength seemed to go from me. The hands lying loosely clasped on my lap began to tremble, and the trembling spread to my limbs and a sudden fear of myself came over me, that I should break down, that I should not be able to hide my sorrow and my suffering always ; that others guessed, knew, pitied me. I half turned away. I stretched out my hand to take the glass of negus which old Jean always prepared for me, but even as I lifted the glass my hand fell shaking *upon the table*. A little hysterical laugh escaped me. "*I believe,*" I said, "that I am growing nervous."

In a moment she had slipped down from her chair and was kneeling by me, her arms round my trembling figure, her kind, dear eyes gazing up to mine.

"Oh, Athole, dear wee cousin, why don't you be frank with me?—why don't you let me help you? Do you think I can't see the change—that I don't know you're just breaking your heart for sake of that fickle, worthless, ne'er-do-weel? You've never been the same since he went to Edinburgh."

I was silent. My heart beat with heavy, laboured throbs. I felt weak and faint and powerless. Perhaps she saw some change in my face, for her eyes looked frightened and she rose quickly.

"Drink this, dear," she said, holding the warm spiced wine to my trembling lips. "It will do you good. You look like a ghost."

I obeyed her, and the warm, stimulating fluid seemed to put some life and strength into me. I leant back in my chair. My hands and lips were steady now.

"I—I am very foolish," I stammered. "Don't mind me, Bella. I shall be all right in a minute."

Tears were dangerously near my eyes, but I would not give way. I put strong constraint upon myself. She stood there beside me in sympathetic silence, only stroking my hair with her firm white hand—the hand whose very touch had always seemed to me to mean strength, help, kindness.

"Now you are better," she said at last, and drew me into her arms as she resumed her seat in Grannie's capacious chair. "But, all the same, this will not do, Athole. You came here to gain health, not to lose it."

"I wonder," I said wearily, "if it is very hard to die?"

She looked at me steadily for a moment. "Do you wish to do it?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered. "I assure you, Bella, I do not care to live. I don't seem to have anything that gives me any interest or hold on life. I am not one of those whose place is missed, whose presence or absence makes much difference; and—and—oh, Bella, I think my heart is broken—my heart is broken."

With a wild sob I clung to her, trembling like a leaf, and with all self-restraint gone from me.

"Hush, dearie, hush!" she said soothingly. "You are tired and weak and unstrung, and I know you have had a great trouble. You were very brave over it. But it has hurt you. Won't it make you easier to speak of it? You know I love you dearly. Your confidence is safe with me——"

"Oh, I know—I know," I sobbed. "But how can I tell you?—how can I speak of it? It is all over now, Bella. I have got to live on and live through it, and——and trust to time for forgetfulness."

"He—he made love to you, then, and you believed him, after all I told you, Athole?"

"Yes, after all you told me, Bella. It was very unwise."

"Poor little child—poor little cousin," she said tenderly. "But perhaps it is not so bad as you think. He may care. He seemed very fond of you. I saw he was from the first, and he may have been obliged to go away in that sudden manner."

"Oh," I cried between my sobs, "it is not that—it is not that! He wrote to me from Edinburgh. Such a cold, cruel letter, Bella, and I could see then so plainly it had only been a passing fancy with him—but for me—oh, it means so much to me, Bella. I—I cannot forget!"

"You will, some day," she said. "You are too good and true to waste your life on an unworthy and unprincipled man."

"I suppose," I said wearily, "he is all you say—all everyone says of him. But he *seemed* so different, Bella."

"He was aye good at make-believe," said my cousin, wrathfully. "They used to say he boasted he could turn the head of any lass, gentle or simple, after half-an-hour's talk with her. He had just such a way with him."

Such a way with him! I thought of the handsome face and the bright eyes, the winning speech, the charm of look and manner, and my heart echoed her words. And I had been so ready to believe—so easy to win!

"Have you heard," asked Bella presently, "that Mrs. Dunleith has left 'The Rowans' and gone to Edinburgh?"

I started involuntarily.

"To Edinburgh!" I faltered. "No—I did not know." *My jealous fancy followed her—imagining her reasons*

—supplying all details. She had gone to Edinburgh because *he* was there. No doubt he wished it, finding her infinitely more alluring and interesting than a simple girl—a girl whose fault had been that one inexcusable fault of letting him win her too easily.

My tears dried, a hot flush of shame and indignation sprang to my cheeks. Pride came to my aid at last. Why should I fret and make myself miserable for sake of one so faithless?

I slipped down from Bella's arms, and took the low stool in front of the fire.

"Now," I said, leaning my head against her knee, "I want you to tell me everything *bad* that you know of Douglas Hay. Every story—every scandal—whatever you have heard of him. Don't keep anything back. I want to know the worst—the very worst. It may cure me. I hope it will. Don't be afraid of hurting me, Bella. I can bear it—indeed I can—and perhaps it will ease this pain of heart. I seem to have borne it so long, and it hurts me—it hurts me!"

"Oh, my dear, my dear," said Bella sadly, "there will be no healing of that wound for many a long day. I know it well. And what can I say more than I have said from the first? I blame myself often that I let you meet him—but I suppose it was to be. I could not have prevented it. And this I will tell you, dear—I never saw Douglas so much in earnest before. That night—here—why the blindest person could not but notice that his eyes and ears and care were all for you. Still, he has always been fickle; I suppose it is his nature, and—shall I tell you something, Athole? I fancy—I have heard hints—that Mrs. Dunleith has some hold on him, and she is a woman of the world and you but a child in comparison, and perhaps it was owing to her he left so suddenly."

I shook my head. I remembered his letter. Every word of it burnt like flame in my memory. Over and over again I told myself there was no excuse for him—none. If he had loved me as I loved him, as he had sworn he loved me, he could not have been so cruel. He could not have left me in silence and suspense.

I knew *then*, better perhaps than I could confess to *myself*, that the worse I thought of Douglas Hay, the

more resentful and hard I became, the better would it be for me.

I must forget him if ever I desired any peace of mind. But at that time I never expected I should accomplish the task save at the cost of all that made up life for me—perhaps even of that life itself.

The blow had gone cruelly home, the wound was very, very deep, and as yet I had lost even all belief in the consolation of Time, and the long vista of days and months that must be *lived* through looked very blank and very dark and very hopeless then.

Bella talked on and I listened, my heart heavy within me at every fresh proof of my lover's unworthiness. For though I sought for such proof and demanded it, it had power to hurt me more than I confessed.

Always—always—I seemed to see his face and the love-light in his eyes, and to hear his voice saying: "Can you not trust me, sweetheart, in spite of all?"

But it seemed to me that he had killed all faith in men and men's words for ever in my heart, and had left in it only the dull ache of ceaseless pain, and a passive acquiescence in what fate might bestow.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

GOOD-BYE.

"Thou hast left me ever, Jamie,
'Thou hast left me ever;
Often hast thou vowed that death
Only should us sever,
Now thou'st left thy lass for aye;
I maun see thee never, Jamie,
I maun see thee never."

THE chill of Autumn was in the air, the mornings and evenings had grown very cold and bleak, and I was still in the Highlands, and likely to remain there for the rest of the year. My father had taken his pretty young wife to Egypt and the Holy Land, on a long tour, and I was to stay with Grannie till they returned. I acquiesced in the arrangement, as indeed I would have acquiesced in

anything that took responsibility off my shoulders and left me in peace.

Everyone was kind and gentle and forbearing with me. My health was decidedly stronger ; the warm salt baths, for which I went twice a week to Nairn, and the wholesome food and air, had done me a great deal of good, added to which the peace and rest and the unfailing tenderness which surrounded me as with an atmosphere of unobtrusive devotion, were inexpressibly soothing both to mind and body.

At the time I may not perhaps have fully realised how much I owed to them, but in after years how the memory came back to me, and how plainly I could read the unselfishness of all the love and care so freely lavished upon me.

We were very quiet in the little house at Craig Bank. Grannie was not strong, and I had no heart for gaiety, so we seldom entertained anyone except the Camerons or kindly Mrs. Macpherson.

Flora was now formally engaged to Alick, and they were to be married within a year or two at the outside.

Bella and I were still devoted friends, and a day rarely passed without our meeting. Kenneth had gone to Edinburgh and was not expected home till Christmas. As for the Laird, he had returned to his own domains for the shooting, and I heard and saw nothing of him.

The quiet days went on, and their quiet and their peace began to soothe some of my own unrest, and to blunt the sharpness of that passionate pain which at first had been so terribly hard to bear.

But there was nothing now of the old girlish wilfulness and gaiety and happy enjoyment of life that had at first made my experience of Scotland so pleasant and so novel a thing. I seemed to have grown years older in those few months. Almost unconsciously I found myself adopting many of the quaint words and phrases and mannerisms of the folk about me. That staidness and gravity which I had at first noticed as so remarkable a characteristic of both old and young, began to shadow my face and manner also.

The calm was somewhat depressing at times, and the gradual saddening of my spirits deepened and increased *in the dreary Autumn weather.*

I was almost a prisoner in the house, and it was not always easy to get away from haunting thoughts and painful memories.

Of Douglas Hay I had heard nothing more. If Kenneth had met him in Edinburgh he did not mention it, but they had never been very friendly towards one another, even in their school days at the Academy, and it was scarcely probable they would fraternize now.

One October day, a day the sun had selected to show himself once more, I went out for a walk by myself. It was rather an unusual occurrence, but Bella was engaged till the evening, and the fine weather would have tempted me from the house, even without Grannie's gentle insinuations as to "a bit walk" being beneficial.

Mechanically I took my way in the direction of Tom-na-Hurich. The sky was a soft misty grey, the crimson bramble leaves looked gorgeous in their Autumn bravery of colour. The dull golds and browns of the trees, and the purple glow of heather, told of the last efforts of Nature to clothe the dying year in beauty.

I walked on briskly till I came to the foot of the hill. The air and exercise seemed to have put life and warmth into me. I looked up at the winding road, and hesitated as to whether I should take it or not. Far up, I could see a funeral coach and a small train of mourners. The sight was melancholy and depressing, for shadows were settling down on the hill-top, and the glints of sunshine came more rarely as the afternoon slowly waned.

I had not been to the place since that memorable day when Douglas had confessed his love, and that memory swept over me suddenly, sharply, with the old pain and the old longing.

I turned abruptly away; I would not go up to the cemetery. Why should I attempt to recall that scene, or live over again that memory?

As I turned, I saw a figure on the road before me—a figure coming straight towards me in the soft grey light. Before I could collect my thoughts, or resolve on any course of action, it was close beside me. I heard my name pronounced by that one voice that had made and marred the music of my life. I saw before me—pale, *dusty*, worn—the figure and face of Douglas Hay.

I stood there silent and still, wondering whether he

would speak—why he was here. I saw his face flush and then grow pale. Impulsively he stretched out his hand, then let it drop as I made no effort to take it.

"Athole," he said huskily, "won't you speak to me?"

But I could find no words. I could only stand there in dumb and frozen silence, looking at the changed and haggard face, wishing in some dull, half-unconscious way that my heart would not beat so painfully.

"I—I only came from Edinburgh this morning," he went on in the same low, uneven tones. "No one knows I am here. I—I just wanted to look at the old place once more, and, if I said the truth, Athole, I hoped Fate might let me have a glimpse of you."

"Of me," I echoed, finding voice at last. "Surely I am the last person you would care to see?"

A deep, dark flush crept over his white face, and spread to the roots of the bright hair above his temples.

"I have no right to your forgiveness, I know. I behaved very badly, but I was mad with jealousy that night, and I knew I was standing in your way. I could not marry you—what had I to offer? and they were all speaking about the Laird, and I know he loved you. I thought I would go away and leave you free. You would soon forget, and as for myself—well, I had never found it hard to do *that*—but, somehow, I was wrong this time, Athole. I haven't forgotten—I can't forget, and, on the spur of some mad impulse, I came here. I thought only to see you, even afar off, would be some consolation—but you are changed, you are not the same Athole. I suppose you will never forgive me, never believe me? I can't blame you for it."

"It would be strange if you could," I said coldly and haughtily.

All my pride was up in arms. Did he think I was to be taken up and thrown aside as his whims dictated?

"You would never understand," he muttered. "I know I am only making matters worse, explanations seem so useless."

I drew back and looked at him steadily. "There is no need," I said, "for any; your absence and your letter were enough. I suppose it flattered your vanity to make such an easy conquest, but I was very young and very inexperienced; this has been a lesson to me."

"I always told you I was a bad lot," he said bitterly. "You may believe the worst of me that you can imagine. But I shall not trouble you again. I am leaving the country. I have had an offer to go to Canada, and I start next week."

I felt cold and sick as I heard those words. Going away—so far—so terribly far—where no word or news of him could reach me. I tried to keep my face unchanged, but I fancied I did not succeed under the strain of that sad, regretful gaze.

"I—I hope you will like it—and be successful," I stammered at last.

His laugh, short and bitter, rang mockingly across the still, soft air. "That," he said, "is very likely, but it makes no matter to anyone. Only—only—Athole, if you would just once take my hand in yours; if you would but say, 'Douglas, I forgive you,' I could face the future with a better heart. God knows it's a sad one enough, but you would not believe that, now."

"Actions speak more truly than words," I answered, the pain at my own heart seeming to make me grow more hard and cold each moment. "And I need only ask you to look back at yours—to remember the way you have treated me—I, who loved you—trusted you—so entirely."

"I don't think you loved me so very much," he said, "at least, if you did, you are very unforgiving."

"Perhaps," I said. "That is my nature. You probably have nothing of that sort to complain of from Mrs. Dunleith."

He started. An angry light flashed from his eyes. "Why do you speak of her?" he asked stormily. "What have you heard?—what do you know?"

"I know that you could find time to make explanations and farewells to her," I said coldly, "while I was left without a word, a sign. I know that you had not been long in Edinburgh before she went there too. I wonder you do not marry her. She is rich and independent, and not—too young. Surely it would be better than going to Canada."

He drew a step nearer. His face white and set, his eyes burning.

"Do you know what you are saying? Marry her!

Thank you, no. Dora Dunleith is not the sort of woman a man marries. You don't mean to say you were ever jealous for one single moment of her?"

"Jealous!" I said, with assumed indifference. "Oh no. That implies love, does it not, and you have argued, to your own satisfaction, that I have never loved you."

"No more you have, or you could not so soon have forgotten. I—I suppose you are going to marry the Laird? He has asked you?"

"He has certainly done me that honour," I said.

"And you have accepted—it is settled—arranged—of course?"

"It is not settled yet," I answered coldly. "But probably that is a mere question of time."

Some demon of pride, anger, almost hatred, entered my heart. For once I had it in my power to hurt him, to deal back something of the pain and humiliation he had dealt me.

The shattered faiths, the broken hopes, the hours of passionate despair, all clamoured now for vengeance, and if every word and look of mine could have been a weapon to stab him to the heart I would not have spared one.

I was no longer Athole Lindsay, the innocent, trusting girl, I was an indignant and embittered and humiliated woman. I had loved him so dearly—so dearly—counting the days so empty that had not brought sight or sound of him, living a very lifetime in those brief hours of joy and companionship—and now it was all dead—all over for ever—and his hand had dealt the blow in very idleness and heedlessness of the suffering it would bring.

No wonder indignation lent me courage. Come what might he should never know how much I had suffered, should read neither regret nor sorrow in my face. I could not believe him in earnest even though I read the change in his face—the sadness in his eyes.

A lesson once learnt as mine had been learnt is hard indeed to forget. All youth's hope and credulity could not come to my aid, or further his cause again.

He was silent for some time after those last words. I did not look at him. I busied myself in arranging some of the wild flowers and autumn berries I had plucked from the hedges.

Presently he turned to me.

"I hope you will be happy," he said. Then with a sneer, "Certainly he is rich, and can give a woman all she most cares for. That is more sensible than marrying for love. But now, as I have said all, and you I suppose have done the same, won't you do what I asked you? Give me a kind look and word to take across the seas—try to say, 'You have been very bad, Douglas, but I forgive you.'"

The blood rushed in a torrent to my face. For a moment my rage and indignation deprived me of speech. At last I found voice.

"No," I cried firmly, "I will *not* say it, for I don't mean it! I never *could* mean it. And I am glad you are going away, very glad. I hope Fate will never let us meet again—for all the misery of my life began with you, and with you it will go."

"Thank you," he said, turning very white. "You are giving me a double burden, but my shoulders are broad, and I—I suppose I can bear it. I never thought you could be so hard—so unforgiving—but I deserve it, I know. Some day you may judge me more mercifully, and think I acted for the best."

"I have not the slightest doubt you have done so," I answered, coldly. "Only your wisdom came a little late in the day, did it not? It is a pity you did not possess or acknowledge it before we took that walk."

I looked up at the hill, which the soft, grey clouds were shrouding, the winding road and the white grave-stones looked faint and indistinct in the light of the waning autumn day.

His eyes followed mine.

"It was a mad impulse," he said, in a low, shaken voice, "I should not have told you. But, whatever you may think, Athole, I meant every word I said."

I laughed mockingly. I could not have helped it. I scarcely knew myself in this new phase of feeling. So bitter—so hard—so cold I seemed to have become.

"It is growing dark," I said. "I ought to be home, and really there is no need to prolong this interview. We have said all that is necessary. We have agreed *that the past was a mistake*. And now——"

I paused. I met his eyes—their pained, sad gaze—their dumb beseeching—but they did not soften me.

He half extended his hand. "And now——" he echoed, "it is to be good-bye."

A lump rose in my throat. I turned aside, striving valiantly to keep back the threatening tears.

"Good-bye," I said at last, and then, relenting, laid my hand in his. I knew in that moment how my heart had hungered for that warm and tender clasp through all these weary months.

He dropped it abruptly and turned aside. He did not speak. He did not ask me again to say, "Douglas, I forgive you."

If he had——

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

"Oh! woman lovely—woman fair,
An angel form's fa'n to thy share
'Twad been o'er mickle to gie thee mair,
I mean an angel mind."

"It is all over," I said, as I hurried home through the gathering dusk. "All over for ever! Well, I ought to be glad—I think I *am* glad. It could never have come to anything."

Yet, if I was so glad, why did that constant dimness blur the landscape? Why did my limbs so tremble—my heart so ache? Can one ever *quite* deceive oneself—try as one may? I think not.

The details of that scene stood out sharp and clear. I could see that haggard young face—those pleading eyes—but still a wild, wicked joy was in my heart. I had had my hour of triumph. I had not let him see what his treachery had cost me. To the last I had been cold, hard, relentless. He had not been able to carry away with him any soft or foolish memory of the girl whose love he had won so easily, and valued so lightly. I was glad of that.

"And now," I told myself, "he will go away. We shall never meet again—and surely—surely in time I shall forget. One cannot be unhappy always."

I reached home to find an assemblage of Camerons there.

Grannie gently chided me for being out so late, the

autumn mists were unhealthy for people whose lungs were not strong. I parried her scolding laughingly. My spirits seemed at fever point.

Kenneth came forth from a crowd of adoring womanhood. He had run up from Edinburgh to announce some success—some brilliant prospects for the future.

They were all going to stay to tea—there was noise, mirth—chatter. Hurriedly I joined in it all, wildly conscious of a dark hour in store for me, but determined not to brood on its advent.

Kenneth had much improved. He was more manly, more self-possessed. He was full of a scheme that had evidently been discussed between Bella and himself before I arrived. She had been invited on a visit to some mutual friends in Edinburgh, and I was included in the invitation.

"You must come," they both insisted. "You will enjoy seeing the town and having a little gaiety after being so quiet here."

"When do you go?" I asked, vaguely interested in the possibility of enjoyment.

"Next week. Monday, if possible," Kenneth said. "I have to return on that day, and I would like to take you both back with me."

"What does Grannie say?"

"We have not told her yet," said Bella. "But you know you can do just what you wish with her."

"I think I should like it," I said. I was conscious of a vague restlessness and discontent, a desire to get away from here and all the memories connected with it. I had heard so much of Edinburgh—its beauty, its gaiety, its historical associations, its intellectual and artistic society. Yes, certainly I would like to go, and the necessity for a rapid decision on that point, seeing that this was Friday, was pleasantly exciting in my frame of mind.

We all set on to Grannie and argued and discussed the subject until she gave in, for at first she was strenuously opposed to the scheme, declaring I was not strong enough, and that they would not take care of me, and that I was unfit for any gay doing, or the fatigues of sight seeing. But I would hear none of those excuses, and combated objection so successfully that my cause was soon won.

We were all in brilliant spirits. We sang, danced,

chattered, until quite a late hour for that quiet household. Uncle Jamie drank whisky toddy until I fairly wondered at the strength of his head, and the patience of his wife. He told us anecdotes by the score, and sang songs in the broadest Celtic dialect. He teased Grannie with even more than his usual zest, and related stories of her pet ministers that, to say the least of them, were risky and irreverent. All the same, we laughed heartily at them and at his wicked delight in the dear old lady's discomfiture.

It was close upon midnight before we broke up and I found myself alone.

Wearied and spent, I threw myself on my bed, trying to remember the events of the day, but it only seemed as if between myself and all that had been, and all that I had loved and cared for with that glad delight which is brief as youth itself, I must roll a heavy stone of forgetfulness.

Athole Lindsay, as I had known her, lay buried beneath that stone. The Athole Lindsay who rose to face life, calm, cold—with all its poetry and romance crushed out for ever—was a very different person.

Whether wiser or better, let her history say.

* * * * *

One gets over a heart-break in time, I suppose. I could not wear my heart on my sleeve, could not let the little world that knew me know also that I had been jilted, deceived, fooled, by an unworthy and fickle lover. I rose up on the morning after I had parted with Douglas Hay, braced and nerved to bear the life that lay before me.

They say that a man with a morning headache is a teetotaller for ever—in theory. In like manner a heart deceived in the spring of its first hopes and promises, is a heart for ever distrustful—in theory.

I told myself I would never care for any man again—never trust any man again. I meant it then, most sincerely, and in a calm, cool, and most prosaic frame of mind, I left for Edinburgh. The peace and callousness which had fallen on my troubled heart and torturing memories was very grateful to me. Here was rest at last, a cessation from pain and self-torture and the frame of mind which I had endured so long.

A week ago, the thought of going to Edinburgh would have thrilled me with excitement, the alternate agony

and fear of meeting my false lover. Now—well, now I looked calmly out of the window as the train sped on over hill and moorland, and told myself it mattered nothing to me were he there or not, whether chance decreed for us another meeting, or whether he had already shaken the dust of his native land from off his feet, and gone to a new world and a new life which would part us for ever.

The journey did not fatigue me. It seemed full of interest, and Kenneth and Bella were excellent travelling companions.

We drove straight from the station to her friends', the Frasers. They lived in a large house overlooking one of the fashionable squares.

The bustling streets, the brilliant shops, the crowds of people, were exhilarating after the quietude of Inverness, and as we drove along I became more and more conscious that I had done wisely in coming here.

There would be no memories of the past to haunt me, no familiar road or walk to face my thoughts with that ever re-current, "Here you came together," and with every effort of will, I resolved that I *would* enjoy, I *would* forget, I would "take the gifts the gods might send me," and put away from mind and memory that sad and painful time of shame and self-torture.

Surely it could not be so hard to forget. Surely life had good gifts laid up still. I looked at Bella's sunny face, at Kenneth's kind, grave eyes that so often sought my own, and at least, if my heart did not beat very gaily, its load seemed less heavy and less hard to bear.

Warm welcome awaited me. I was not allowed to feel myself a stranger for a single moment. Kenneth left us at the door, but was coming back later in the evening. Meanwhile, Bella and I were shown into a large and cosily-furnished bedroom, where firelight and lamplight made a glow of warmth and comfort, pleasant enough after the long, cold journey.

Tea was brought to us, and we removed our dusty travelling wraps, and, clad in warm dressing-gowns, sat with our feet on the fender, resting and enjoying the comfort of it all, until it was time to dress for dinner.

"Maggie Fraser said there were one or two people *expected to night*," said my cousin, as we contemplated

the evening dresses the neat Scotch maid was laying out for us. "What shall you wear, Athole?"

"Black velvet. It is too cold for light dresses," I said with a shiver.

"Isn't it rather—rather old?" asked Bella, dubiously.

She had elected to wear a pink silk gown, which, to my thinking, was far too bright and garish for her rather brilliant colouring and robust figure. But, as a rule, Scotch girls do not take kindly to quiet hues and subdued tints.

We dressed accordingly. I, in the plain black velvet, with its square-cut bodice and rich jet trimmings, unrelieved, save by some white flowers that the maid brought us—and Bella, gay as any peony, in her pink silk and flowing train and flower-decked hair.

Thus attired we went down-stairs as the bell sounded.

Everyone seemed already seated, or standing by the fire-place in the drawing-room—a group, whose faces and figures were alike unfamiliar.

The usual introductions followed. Then, suddenly, unexpectedly, I saw among the faces, one looking coldly, scrutinizingly back to my own. I seemed to turn to ice—so cold, so strange a feeling took possession of me.

Before me, seated on a low ottoman, was a vision in palest grey, that floated, mist-like, about her graceful figure, and framed in soft folds the beautifully moulded neck and arms.

I was face to face with Mrs. Dunleith.

CHAPTER III.

"FOR THE BEST."

"Oh, Nannie! the heart that is true
Has something more costly than gear;
Ilk e'en it has naething to rue,
Ilk morn it has naething to fear."

How poor and crude a thing seems youth before the finished graces and ready tact of a woman of the world.

Not by so much as the flicker of an eyelash did Mrs. Dunleith betray the smallest feeling, while I—I turned hot and cold, flushed and paled, and could scarcely summon self-command to bow, or return the conventional greetings of society.

For the sight of the woman recalled everything. My jealous fears, my self-torments, my lover's broken faith, my own doubts. And I read even in her one brief glance, that I was no stranger to her—that she knew something about me; perhaps Douglas had discussed me with her—perhaps they had laughed together over my foolish faith—my ready conquest!

With a great effort, I recalled my scattered wits, and tried to resume the composure that had been so easily disturbed.

Some grey-headed old gentleman was bowing to me, and offering his arm to take me in to dinner. I learned, later on, that he was a learned and celebrated professor at the University. I fear the poor man must have found me a terribly stupid and uninteresting companion. Try as I might, I could not keep my attention from wandering to that grey-gowned syren, with her soft voice, her low, sweet laugh, her indolent, graceful gestures.

The man who had taken her in to dinner seemed very devoted. He had eyes and ears for no one else. But, as far as I could judge, there was not much in her. She seldom spoke—and then only in brief response to her admirer's observations—but she was attentive and interested—I suppose men like that. Then she had so sweet a smile, so perfect a manner, that most of the women present seemed stiff, or coarse, or crude, by comparison.

I wondered not that the delicate flattery of such a woman's interest, should charm any young man's senses—or old man's either, for the matter of that.

The fortunate—or unfortunate—individual, on whom she was practising her arts was decidedly middle-aged—almost as old I fancy as my own professor. But he seemed charmed and interested, which my friend certainly did not. After a time he gave up conversation, and devoted himself to his dinner—only addressing an occasional word to me now and then, respecting the merits of some dish I had refused.

But I had no appetite, and the dinner seemed to me a very long and wearisome ceremony. Like all things however—be they bad or good—it came to an end at last; *and the silks and velvets rustled away into the drawing-room, and I found myself once more under Bella's wing,*

Scarcely had we seated ourselves, however, when Mrs. Dunleith dropped, in graceful languor, into the low settee by my side. She commenced to talk to Bella. I, most assuredly, was not inclined to further, or commence conversation.

They discussed dresses—the Northern Meetings—Highland scenery, and various other subjects. She told us that she intended returning shortly to the Rowans. "Indeed," she added, glancing at me, "I had not intended to stay so long in Edinburgh as I have done. I merely came on a matter of business—to assist a friend in whom I take an interest—a very great interest. I am happy to say I have been of some service to him; but he is leaving Scotland next week, and then I shall go back to my little house again."

I was silent—but the hot blood burnt in my cheeks, and a feeling of bitter indignation swelled in my heart. Well enough I knew who was the friend in whom she took "a very great interest." So it was through her influence Douglas Hay had secured this appointment in Canada—that he was about to leave the country.

Well, it did not matter now. Whether he was in this land or any other could make no difference to me—only a spasm of jealous agony contracted my heart as I thought how she had come between us—for some instinct told me that, no doubt, she had warned him against the folly of early engagements—or worked on his feelings until they seemed selfish and inconsiderate. She had parted us with her sweet voice—her pretended sympathy—her charms and witcheries—beside which, I felt my youth and bluntness and inexperience made but a poor show.

And now she was sitting there—stabbing me with every word and ~~hi~~ graceful languorous glance. She, who could do what all my love had been unable to do.

I wonder how it is a woman guesses she has met a rival?

Mrs. Dunleith and I had never interchanged a word with one another before this night. Yet we both seemed to recognize that we had cared for the same man. I say "had cared," but, probably, she cared still. I fancied so, and I almost wondered she had not tried to win him more securely. Surely it could not have been so very *difficult for one who had done so much.*

I had yet to learn, however, that Douglas, if malleable up to a certain point, could be iron and adamant beyond. He had left himself in this woman's hands with the carelessness and conceit of youth. He knew she cared for him, but—though I only learnt this long afterwards—he did not care for her in like manner.

He pulled himself up, short and sharp, just as she fancied she was leading him where she desired. I might not have believed this then—even on her own confession—but the day was coming when I should learn more of men's ways and feelings, and judge them less harshly, even if I thought of them less highly.

It was a relief when Kenneth entered, and at once joined us. Then the other men came in from the dining-room, and we broke up into groups of twos and threes, and music and conversation filled up the rest of the evening.

"I hope you will enjoy yourself here," said Kenneth, as he bade me good-night later on. "I shall come and take you about as much as possible. You have been rather moped at Grannie's. A little amusement and excitement will do you good."

I agreed that it would. I had determined to throw myself heart and soul into everything that was pleasurable and gay. Surely that would cure this dull ache—this constant memory.

I was so tired that night that I could scarcely speak to Bella, and in two minutes after my head touched the pillow I was sound asleep.

* * * * *

Clear air, a bright sky, noise, bustle, exhilaration. I woke to all this and prepared, with a lighter heart than I had known for many a long day, to explore the city. Kenneth was our guide, and we drove of course through Princes Street, and viewed Scott's gigantic monument and the beautiful public gardens, and the famous Castle, and walked through the old town, and went up to Arthur's Seat, and then returned tired—but by no means half sated with sight-seeing—for luncheon.

To my inexpressible amazement who should drop in at luncheon-time, with all the *savoir faire* of an old and welcome friend, but the Laird of Corriemoor. He explained he was in Edinburgh on business for a week or

two, and as the Frasers were very old friends he naturally came to see them at once.

Bella looked mischievously at me as she listened to his elaborate explanations. It was plain that she at all events, did not credit him with absolute truthfulness in the matter.

The Frasers were, however, quite unsuspecting, and if I felt a little embarrassed and surprised at first, I hope I did not show it very plainly. Bella assured me I did not, so I was comforted, and put the best face on the matter.

I must candidly say that whatever business had brought the Laird to the city, he did not spend very much time over it. He was constantly with us, greatly to Kenneth's annoyance. He took us to theatres, museums, and accompanied us on drives, walks, and excursions of all kinds.

I cannot but say I enjoyed it all. He was so well-informed and clever that all matters of history, archæology and literature connected with Scotland, became both interesting and intelligible to me.

He seemed to know every house and history of the old town, and every story and legend of famous Holy rood. We spent hours there, and the sorrow and the pathos of its many memories acquired a painful and vivid interest for me. No longer could I say that I had little knowledge and less interest in Scotland, and things Scotch. With such a guide and companion that confession would have been rank heresy. Quiet and grave as the Laird of Corriemoor seemed on first acquaintance, it was marvellous how he unbent after a time, and how genial and pleasant a companion he could make himself.

Scarcely a day passed that we did not meet. Indeed I had grown so used to his appearance and escort that I should have felt quite strange without them. Bella wisely kept silence, and for the space of three weeks matters went on as I have described.

Mrs. Dunleith had gone back to Inverness. That fact said plainly to me that Douglas Hay had taken his departure also, I had not seen him since we parted at *Tom-na-Hurich*, nor heard word or news of him.

It could not matter. I told myself that silence was

best, and its sombre veil fell darkly between my lover and me.

A change, a subtle, indefinable change, had come over my feelings and myself. Whether I was the happier or the better for it I could not say, but at least I had a brief space of rest and peace, and I told myself that it would last always—always now.

* * * * *

"Bella," I said, coming abruptly into the bedroom one evening, where my cousin was comfortably ensconced in an arm-chair and luxuriously busy in doing nothing, except looking at the fire—"Bella, I have some news for you."

She raised her merry dark eyes to my face. "Are you sure," she said, "that it will be—news?"

"It ought to be," I said. "I only made up my mind half-an-hour ago. I am going to marry the Laird."

"Of course," she said coolly, "I always knew you would."

I sank down in the companion arm-chair to her own, and looked at her with indignant unbelief.

"I am sure you did not," I said. "You couldn't have known it. No one could. Nothing was further from my intentions. I never *dreamt* of such a thing when I came here."

"Probably not," answered Bella; "but, dreaming or waking, one could see what it was all tending to. And indeed, dear," she added gravely, "I am very—very glad. He is so good, and the marriage is altogether so suitable, and certainly he has been most devoted ever since he saw you first."

I laughed somewhat hysterically.

"Well, this was the third time of asking," I said. "He has certainly displayed his national virtue of perseverance."

"How did he do it?" asked Bella laughing. "Somehow I *cannot* fancy the Laird making love."

"Well, he did not follow the example of his countryman in Dean Ramsay's 'Reminiscences,' and allure me to a churchyard to say 'My folk lie there; wad ye no like to lie there wi' them?' His three proposals have all been very matter-of-fact. I——"

"I am glad of that. I hope he won't 'make love' as you call it."

"Don't you think he is too sensible, and—well—and too old for that, Bella?"

"As to being sensible," said Bella, "don't they say love makes the wisest man the biggest fool? and as for age, I won't be sure that the Laird is so very old, my dear, not more than seven or eight-and-thirty. That's not old for a man."

I was silent, gazing meditatively into the fire and twisting absently round and round my finger the ring that had been so recently placed there, just to keep me in mind of him, my affianced had said. On the morrow he was to bring me another one.

"No," I said at last, "I suppose not; but it seems old, Bella. I am only seventeen."

"Have you quite made up your mind?" she asked gravely. "Do you think you have got over that—that other? That you have really forgotten——"

"I am quite sure," I said slowly, though a strange tightness seemed about my heart, and a lump rose to my throat and impeded my speech. "I do not say I have forgotten, but I have ceased to care. I have got over that fancy at last."

Bella looked at me somewhat anxiously. "I hope—oh, I hope you are not deceiving yourself, Athole," she said. "You may make two lives unhappy instead of one; and after all, do yourself no good. I suppose you don't care very much for Donald Campbell?"

I was silent for a moment, trying to face the question honestly and fairly as I knew it ought to be faced.

"I care for him enough to marry him," I said at last. "I know there is no romance about it, but that is all the better. Most married people, as far as I can judge, get heartily sick of one another in a year or two. I suppose it comes from expecting too much, and all that glorified ideality which means love, and is as unreal as—well—as love. I have done with all that nonsense. I have learnt my lesson, and now I am going to profit by it. We shall be a sensible, matter-of-fact pair, neither of us expecting too much or exacting too much from the other. We ought to be happy."

Bella shook her head. Her bright eyes looked a little dim and saddened as I met their loving gaze.

"Ah, my dear," she said, "those sentiments would

sound very well if you were thirty-seven instead of seventeen. As it is I know you neither feel nor believe them. Be honest and say so."

I only shook my head. "Indeed, Bella, I do mean them. I have grown much older and more sensible in these last few weeks, and I like him very much. I really do. He is so good and kind, and he seems so *true*. After all, that is the best thing to trust to. Better than romance or love. And you know I am not wanted at home. Since papa married again he does not seem to care for me as he used to do, and Eleanor is so jealous. I suppose she wants to have him all to herself. Well, I will not interfere with them any more. It seems funny,"—and I laughed, but not very mirthfully I fear—"to think that I shall be able to invite them to stay with me, to offer them Highland hospitality—fishing, shooting, all that sort of thing. By the way, what kind of place is Corriemoor?"

"I have never seen it," answered Bella. "But I have always heard it is a very fine place, and very large, miles and miles of moorland—lochs for fishing, and shooting wild birds—grand scenery—beautiful air. Oh, I'm sure it is a very fine place, indeed. But how will you like the Laird's mother, I wonder? You know she lives with him to keep house for him. But perhaps she will leave when you go there."

"She is welcome to stay," I answered with indifference. "I am sure I shall not interfere with her. And as I am quite ignorant of housekeeping I shall be very glad to have her."

I rose from my chair and Bella did the same.

Suddenly she drew me into her arms, as tenderly as a mother might have done.

"God bless you, poor wee bairn," she said softly, "and give you strength and make the path easy for your feet. I cannot say that I'm altogether happy about you, though you've acted wisely, and he's a good man, and loves you dearly, I am sure. Still——"

My kiss stayed the words on her lips, and they ended in a sigh.

CHAPTER IV.

HONEYMOON PROSPECTS.

"Lilies for a bridal bed,
Roses for a matron's head,
Violets for a maiden dead,
Pansies let my flowers be:
On the living grave I bear,
Scatter them without a tear,
Let no friend, however dear,
Waste one hope—one fear for me!"

So it was all settled, and I had sealed my fate.

Everyone seemed pleased who heard the news, and congratulations poured in on all sides. Everyone—that is to say, with the exception of Kenneth. He neither looked pleased, nor expressed satisfaction. However, I fear I paid little heed to him, I was too engrossed with the new responsibilities and exigencies of my position as a betrothed maiden.

Grannie wrote rapturously on the subject, and declared I must be married from her house. We all seemed to take my father's consent for granted—but really there could be no possible objection to such a son-in-law as the Laird of Corriemoor, and I had not the slightest doubt he would only be too grateful to the man who would take me off his hands and leave him free to be the slave and worshipper of his newly-wedded and most exacting young wife.

My lover was not a very passionate, or ardent one. He evidently liked to be with me. He was most generous in gifts and offerings, but he did not attempt that performance of which I had expressed such a nervous dread, viz., "making love."

I was not of a demonstrative nature myself. It had never been easy to me to express my feelings. I had none of the pretty provocative caressing ways of most women, and it would have been a sheer impossibility for me to have coquetted with, or teased my grave, staid lover, even had I wished to do so.

He took me for walks and drives as of old, but I still had Bella with me, and he never made the slightest *objection to her company*. At the end of a fortnight he

hinted that he must leave Edinburgh and betake himself to his ancestral halls, there to break the news to his mother.

"It is more respectful to do so by word of mouth," he said, and I agreed, with due deference and a vague expression of regret at his absence, which I am afraid I did not really experience.

My visit to Edinburgh was drawing to a close, so Bella and I returned under his escort, and after spending one night in Inverness he left for Corriemoor, and I settled down to the old quiet life, which lasted with but little variation until the arrival of my father's letter.

It came from Cairo, where they were staying, and as I expected gave glad and gracious sanction to the proposal of any individual rash and generous enough to relieve a father of the expense and responsibility of a feminine dependant.

It is a daughter's duty to get married—*well*, if possible, but at all events to get married. Probably he had not hoped or expected such a speedy or gratifying result from my visit to his native land. Of course he knew Corriemoor *well*, and the Campbells of Corriemoor were as a household word in the family. He would not be back in England for, six months, but there was no need to wait for his presence, if the bridegroom was impatient and the bride acquiescent. He enclosed a cheque for £200 for the trousseau, and referred the Laird to his lawyers for all particulars as to his affairs and my prospective inheritance, announced that Eleanor joined with him in love and good wishes, and they both trusted that I might be very happy—as happy as they were themselves.

That was all. Grannie and I read it, and then I sent it on to the Laird, with an enclosure for himself. He was quite satisfied, and wrote back proposing that we should be married as soon after the New Year as I could decide upon.

I looked apprehensively at, Grannie as I handed her the letter containing this suggestion.

"It is so soon," I said.

"'Tis ill waiting when the will is gude," laughed the old lady. "Take him, my bairn, and don't ask for delays. You'll aye be the better for settling down and getting acquainted with one another, and no courting will teach ye that, take an auld woman's word for it. Ye may see

each other every day and all day, but it's no' the same as one good week of steady matrimony. Lovers are aye on their guard, but husbands and wives know that they must just put up wi' their bargain, and if it is based first on solid virtues, and good honest love and respect, there's nae much to fear of results."

Wise words, good sound doctrines, Grannie. A pity they sounded so cold and common-place to me.

* * * * *

While December was yet in its early days the Laird returned, and the question of our speedy marriage was again mooted. I let them arrange it as they pleased, so the middle of January was fixed upon for the all-important ceremony, and I was engulfed in a whirl of millinery and haberdashery which was a very novel sensation, and appeared to offer endless gratification and excitement to Grannie and my cousins.

My future mother-in-law sent me a kindly though somewhat formal letter of congratulation and welcome. She regretted her health would not permit of the long journey to Inverness in the winter-time, but looked forward to welcoming me at Corriemoor as her daughter when our honeymoon was over.

Our honeymoon!

The words seemed to appal me as I read them, standing out in that clear firm writing.

My spirits fell as they had not fallen yet. A honeymoon—a whole long, weary, dreary month to be spent in uninterrupted companionship with just one man. No merry feminine chatting crew to laugh and jest with—no friends to visit or receive. Only he and I together—husband and wife—yoked for life in matrimonial harness, to make the best or worst of our experiment.

For one wicked unholy moment my thoughts flew to Douglas. There would have been no hardship in such a prospect had he occupied the place of bridegroom—but the Laird . . . what could we say—what could we do that would make the time less wearisome and monotonous? And in the winter—the cold dreary days when rain or snow might keep us chained to the dreary grandeur of hotels! Ugh! I shuddered as I thought of it.

A sudden resolution took possession of me. With

the letter in my hand, I marched off to the drawing-room, where my affianced was awaiting my tardy presence.

"Laird," I said abruptly—having yet vainly tried to accustom my tongue to more familiar greeting—"where are we going when we're married? Do you want to stay here—in Scotland?"

He turned his ruddy, weather-beaten face to me in some surprise at my unexpected question.

"I had thought of taking you to Perth. It is a bonnie town," he said, with some hesitation. "I fear the weather will be somewhat inclement for the Lochs, or we might have gone to the Western Highlands. But, my dear, it is for you to say. Where would you like to go yourself? Just say the word, and I'm not likely to deny you."

"I should like to go away from Scotland altogether," I said. "It is so cold, so bleak, so dreary. Can't we go abroad—say to the South of France, the Riviera, anywhere where we could find blue sky and sunshine? I feel frozen up here."

"Go abroad!" he repeated—genuine consternation visible in every line of his face. "Away—out of the country? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes," I said. "To some warm country. I know you have never been out of Scotland, but that will make it all the more interesting. I'll do all the talking, if you can't speak French or German."

He sighed hopelessly.

"You shall do just as you please, Athole," he said, with creditable meekness. "I suppose Scotland is somewhat bleak and cold for a delicate wee thing like yourself. But remember, my dear, I know nothing of foreign ways and customs, and fear I shall aye be blundering and bothering you. Will you put up with that?"

"Oh, yes," I said laughing, and too pleased at my easy triumph to cavil at anything else. "Don't be afraid, Laird, we shall get on very well, and it will be great fun to see how surprised you will be at the difference between foreign customs, and your national ones."

He smiled a little sadly. Perhaps he did not think his honeymoon a cheerful prospect, or see the "fun" that his unfamiliarity with things new and strange and *incomprehensible* might afford me, in quite the same *light as I did*.

However, it was arranged that we should journey into foreign lands in search of warmth and sunlight, and the excitement of making plans and deciding upon different routes greatly relieved the usual monotony of our daily interviews.

I had always had a great desire to go to Nice and Cannes, and see the lovely blue Mediterranean, and revel amidst the palms and orange groves, when less-favoured folk were shivering over fires and fogs at home.

I hated cold. Warmth, brightness, sunshine, were like life to me, and the vision of a Scotch winter in the lonely wilderness of Corriemoor had simply appalled me.

But I had triumphed. Whatever the Laird really thought, he affected "a virtue though he had it not." He seemed pleased and contented, and I was willing to believe he really felt so.

Meanwhile the days seemed to race along. The last remaining week of maiden liberty already announced itself.

We had kept the New Year with wassail and merriment, and much feasting, and my relations and friends had vied with each other in the giving of dinners and suppers and such like festivals in honour of my prospective bridegroom and myself.

I was growing a little tired of it all. Of the speeches that were almost always the same, the solemn ceremony of eating and drinking that invariably lapsed into orgies when ladies withdrew, and whisky appeared, and the revellers emptied the "flowing bowl" to our health with more good-will than discretion. There certainly was a good deal of similarity in all these entertainments, and I now and then had serious doubts as to whether even my grave and strong-headed Donald was altogether circumspect in the matter of potations.

I supposed, however, it was the custom of the country—though for the life of me I could not see why people should drink more than was good for them, and incur the penalties and discomforts arising therefrom, in order to show their appreciation of a fellow mortal's matrimonial bliss.

But the national beverage—with or without excuse—was ever flowing in generous streams, and all sorts and conditions of men partook of it—and were the result of it. I did not like the custom, I must say, and I

thought it a singular fact that so religious and Bible-quoting a race, should be also such an inebriated one.

But the Scotch have their own way of interpreting the Scriptures, and I am not sure that they could not find or twist a host of texts to mean that whisky-drinking was a matter altogether pleasing to the Almighty, and specially demanded as a duty of His elect! I wondered could they picture Heaven without it!

* * * * *

My wedding day dawned clear and cold, with a steely sky and faint gleams of sunshine. In accordance with Scotch habits, I was to be married in the house.

Bella assisted at the important function of the toilet, which was simplicity itself.

"If only you were not so pale," she said, as she fastened the snowy veil which covered me from head to foot.

I looked at myself with a strange sense of unrecognition. So small, so white, with such wistful dark eyes, such tremulous pale lips—surely this was not how a happy bride should look. But was I happy?

For a moment the thought flashed across me—keen in its pain and regret. The face that looked back at me was the face of one who had abandoned all hope, and lost all joy.

For the first time it seemed to me that I was acting both wrongly and unwisely. I was marrying a man for whom I cared but little—if at all—certainly not as a wife should care for her husband.

Certainly I had made no false professions—I had never told him I loved him—but perhaps he had taken that for granted. The full importance and solemnity of my action impressed me at last. Until this moment, when I stood and looked at that small white figure, and that young sad face, and knew them for my own, on this my bridal day, I had not fully realized what I was taking upon myself.

I shuddered and turned aside, and for one brief moment my self-command trembled in the balance.

Bella took my hands, a look of alarm in her eyes.

"Hush, Athole. Oh, my dear, you mustn't break down—not now."

I snatched my hands from her grasp, and pressed

them tight against my eyes, trying to keep back the tears that threatened to break forth. I shook from head to foot, but I would not give way to the hysterical emotion that had seized me.

It was so foolish, so weak, and ah! so useless now.

"Don't speak, Bella, just leave me quiet for a moment," I entreated, and with ready tact and good sense she turned away and stood by the window, waiting till I had recovered my self-control.

Presently I turned to her, and held out my hand. "I am—quite ready. Let us go down," I said.

My voice was quite steady. She looked at me. I saw her eyes grow suddenly dim. But mine were dry and tearless now.

CHAPTER V.

"IT'S WELL ENOUGH."

"And you must love him, ere to you
He will seem worthy of your love."

"And often, glad no more,
We wear a face of joy because
We have been glad of yore."

"A man he seems of cheerful yesterdays
And confident to-morrows."

WHAT a long time since there have been any entries in my diary!

Sometimes I have thought I would give up the foolish habit altogether. There is no use in being confidential to paper and ink, and it is but a poor satisfaction to see the record of one's follies and errors and griefs staring one in the face after a lapse of time.

Yet habit is strong, and they say women must always have *one* confidante. I have none save this book with its pages, some blank, some full, and certainly I can be more confidential to it than to any human being, so to-day I open it again, and make the first entry I have cared to make since my marriage.

My marriage!

Surely it was years and years ago that I stood in the little drawing-room at Craig Bank, and, surrounded by *admiring relatives* and friends, put my hand into the

hand of Donald Campbell and heard the simple words that made us man and wife.

And now, here we are, amidst bright sunshine and blue seas, and the prospect on which I look is fair enough to delight any eye—poet's, or artist's, or ordinary mortal's.

The wind shakes the odours from the orange buds, the olive woods are silver-grey in the sunlight. It is a day early in February, but on this fair coast it might have been the height of Spring time, so sweet and mild is the air, with the breath of narcissus, and primroses, and myrtles, and violets, that blossom by millions under the sea-terraces, and in the woods of the villas.

The hotel windows look out on the blue Mediterranean ; the sky is rose and gold in the west, where the sun is slowly sinking behind hills of amethyst, and snows of silver. All along the curves of the bay the sea flashes and sparkles as if glad of its own beauty—purple here, azure there, as the light catches its rippling surface.

Figures pass to and fro under the palms, the marbles of the Casino are white as snow in the lovely glowing light. Monaco frowns darkly from the crest of its rocky hill—white sails of yachts and pleasure-boats are drifting to Villefranche, or San Remo. I look at it all and think how beautiful it is, after the grey skies and chill mists and cold, bleak snows of my northern home.

But the beauty saddens me—why, I cannot explain !

As for the Laird (I still call him that), he has taken quite kindly to foreign travel and foreign ways. The little difficulties as to baggage, hotels, and money-exchange are made comprehensible by my thorough acquaintance with French, and many Continental journeys, and my husband is perfectly content to pay so long as I can explain the why and wherefore of payment required.

At the present moment he is at the Casino, studying the mysteries of *roulette*, and determining whether it is quite a proper place to take me to this evening, as I have requested.

We have stayed a week at Nice, and now are paying wicked little Monte Carlo a visit. I did not care to go out, and am lazily sitting here at the open window, contemplating the beauty of the scene, and, as I confessed before, making fresh entries in my long neglected *journal*. What shall I confess to its pages, as to happy

ness or unhappiness, sorrow or content? They are all blended in my memory as I look back on my few weeks of wedded life. Donald is very, very good to me, very kind, very thoughtful, but there is no use disguising the truth—we are utterly, utterly unsuited to one another. He has not a particle of poetry or romance in his whole nature. He cannot understand why I should rhapsodize over a scene, or cry and laugh at a theatre, if moved to do so by some subtle and perfect piece of acting, or tremble and grow pale at some strain of grand church music, that seems to lift my soul heavenwards independent of ceremonies or, ritual.

No, feelings and emotions such as these seem a riddle unto him, and he looks at me wonderingly as if I were some strange specimen of humanity such as had never come under his ken before.

I suppose if it were not for the constant travelling and the novelty and excitement of sight-seeing, and the—to me—never failing interest of hotel life, we should have been heartily sick of each other's society by this time. You see, I am honest to you, my diary, and dare to confess the truth.

But even with sight-seeing, and driving, and railway journeys, and the amusement to be derived from watching one's fellow mortals at hotels, and observing insular prejudices and airs and graces—displayed to the obsequious and not too honest foreigner, who pockets insults and guineas with equal magnanimity—even with all this, I cannot but agree that honeymoons are a mistake.

Perhaps if one were very much in love——Heigh ho! What is the use of talking nonsense? There is a young couple there in the gardens below, pacing up and down among the palms, and tropical plants, and stranger exotics, whom we have come across from time to time. They are honeymooning also, but are in a state of idiotic, engrossed infatuation that is distressing to a well-regulated mind.

I have watched them occasionally with a sort of wondering interest. They never seem to weary of one another, never care apparently for other company. Even at *table-d'hôte* I have seen her hand slip into his, a chance look of love unutterable flash from their meeting eyes, or caught some tender phrase whispered under cover of the general conversation.

Sometimes I have felt envious of her. She seems so perfectly, entrancedly happy, and he—he is young, handsome, debonnair, an ideal bridegroom, and apparently an amusing companion, to judge from the ripples of laughter I hear, and the perpetual jokes they have in common.

The Laird seldom laughs, and if I ever venture upon a mild jest or draw his attention to anything that strikes me as ridiculous, he seems to weigh the matter long and seriously in his mind before relaxing even into a smile at it. This is not encouraging, so I have devoted myself to drawing *him* out on the subject of his native land, and find he can get almost eloquent on that subject—but alas, on that only.

I suppose the sentiment of clanship is very strong among Scotch folk—Highlanders especially, and it exists up to the present time, despite the disbanding of clans after Culloden, a history that has been poured into my somewhat inattentive ears very frequently.

The Laird is not one of the roving class of landlords. He and his fathers before him have rarely left their native moors, even for other places and towns in their own country. As I have already said, this is Donald's first experience of foreign lands, and perhaps that accounts for his reticence and want of enthusiasm. A deprecatory shake of the head, a sort of "Well, it's no that bad" is about all I can win from him in the way of praise or admiration.

It is somewhat disheartening, I confess. I have never seen him excited or amused. To everything and everybody he displays that unruffled calm, that watchful observance, that unflinching good-temper, which is at once so characteristic and so trying in his people.

Nothing disturbs his equanimity, but nothing seems deserving of praise. Even as to climate, when I venture to remark on the delight of sunshine, blue sky, settled weather, he is up in arms to defend his mists, and rains, and bleak cold days of wind and storm. "Three hours of sunshine in the Highlands is worth three weeks of this calm, monotonous glare," he would say, "there is no light and shade, no sudden change of colour, no contrast of gloom and glory like our skies and mountains there." And I can but shrug my shoulders

and try to "command my soul in patience," and wonder why people are so obstinate in their prejudices.

"Wait till I show you a Highland sunset," he would say. Nor can I ever get him to allow that anything in the way of scenery we have yet seen is worthy of comparison with the lochs and hills of his native land—or that these calm seas deserve to be mentioned in the same breath with the long rolling surges that thunder along the Cromarty shores, or sweep up in stormy waves to Nairn, and Findhorn, and Burghead?

When a person—especially a Scotch person—is obstinately prejudiced in favour of their own particular land, it is hopeless to try and make them change their opinion. I gave in, at first protestingly—then resignedly, as behoved a wedded wife—and I have ceased now to try and rouse any enthusiasm in the heart of my lord and master on any subject whatever.

Perhaps these facts account for my sudden fit of confidence to my journal.

The sense of utter unsuitability to each other oppresses me more and more. It is not only the gulf of years that lies between us, but the impossibility to think—talk—feel—alike on any given subject.

I feel that I am fast lapsing into depression and unsociability—withdrawing more and more into myself, and every day I assure that self that honeymoons are a great and grievous mistake, and wonder whether after all it would not have been better to remain in the land that has the honour of owning Corriemoor as one of its possessions.

At least I could have curtailed the length of that period of boredom, or could have had Bella to stay with me, according to promise.

Now I have absolutely no one to speak to, or confide in. How can I expect staid and matter-of-fact Donald to understand the vague whims and fancies, the caprices and exactions, the moods and vagaries, of young womanhood?

They are all new and strange to him, and he has no key to unlock their mysteries. He constantly dilates on the perfections of his mother, who seems, from his description, to possess every feminine virtue under the sun; but he appears to know very little about women, and has evidently taken her as a model for the rest of *her sex*.

If they are not like her—they ought to be.

I know I am very, very different. I begin to think he is also on the way to find that out, and that soon—very soon—he will be telling himself that he has made a mistake, and the knowledge of that mistake will shadow all the future of his honest, useful, blameless life.

"Well, I suppose we are not the only people who have done that," I say to myself, somewhat bitterly, as I turn away from the sight of that pair of wedded lovers in the gardens below.

But the reflection is none the more consolatory because of its truth.

With it, however, I close this page of my journal, and proceed to look out a suitable gown for *table-d'hôte* at seven o'clock.

* * * * *

It was a strange sight that met my eyes last night, when the Laird and I left the brilliant rooms of the Grand Hotel de Paris, and walked across the lovely gardens to the Casino.

With the blundering obstinacy of manhood he had, as I said before, gone over to the rooms in the afternoon to decide whether I might with safety be brought thither *in the evening*.

The difference in the scene must have been startling, or so I imagined from his look of amazement and from my own later experience. The *Salle de Jeu* at 4 p.m. and at 9 p.m. is a very different place. And what a contrast between the scene without, lit by the imperial splendour of moon and stars, and the garish brilliance of the rooms with their gaudy decorations and gilding—their moving, restless crowds—the incessant hum of voices in all languages—the chink of gold and silver—the monotonous cry of the croupiers—the idle, foolish laughter of painted women in airy toilettes and marvellous diamonds, as they pass to and fro with their no less foolish admirers,

A concert was going on in the room set apart for that purpose, but the audience was very scanty. The attractions of the tables certainly outweighed those of the diviner art.

I looked with keen interest at the scene. For me it had all the charm of novelty—all the wonder of the un-

known. How absorbed some of the faces—how reckless and anxious others. What histories must have lain hidden under the paint and powder—the beauty and the vileness—the despair and effrontery—the nobility and baseness—that world of physiognomy presented!

"I want to watch the roulette players," I said to the Laird, as we made our way through the brilliant, restless throng.

He glanced uneasily about him, as if fearful of encountering some compatriot or acquaintance who would be shocked and amazed at such a proceeding.

"Indeed I'm thinking it's not a right place for a lady to be in," he said hesitatingly. "It's no ways the same as when I saw it this afternoon. The crowd is just fearful, and certainly most of them look—well, I would not just call it—respectable."

I laughed. I could not help it. He looked so distressed, and so perplexed. To me the types and faces were not so very different from those I had seen in the parks and hotels of Paris and Brussels, or at the races of Longchamps and Baden. But I suppose there was something very shocking and very immoral about both place and people, to my staid and virtuous Donald.

However, I had my way, and we struggled through a mass of skirts and elbows to a vantage point at one of the tables.

There they sat in steady, immovable array—the army of players—white, calm, desperate. All of life and feeling they possessed seemed centred in their eyes. Those strange, glittering, furtive glances fixed on the colour, or the piles of gold and silver, had a horrible fascination for me. I watched them, awed and wondering: the people with systems—the reckless believer in chance—the devotee of a combination of numbers—the cautious calculator of colour.

There they sat, steadfast and engrossed, oblivious to all else but that fatal pastime.

Wizened old women side by side with young girls; men—old, middle-aged, youthful, rich and reckless, or poor and calculating. There seemed contagion in the atmosphere. Suppressed excitement—mirth—triumph—expectation—hope—despair—so ran the gamut of humanity's best and worst emotions.

I stood there, protected by Donald's stalwart form from the pressure of the crowd, and following with vivid interest the chances of the game and the varying luck of the players.

I suppose he did not find so much interest in it as I did, for he soon began to show signs of impatience.

"Come away, Athole," he entreated at last; "this is no fit place for you. To me it looks just as fearful as hell itself might do."

I turned aside then and followed him through the rooms again, and we left the noise and heat and glare behind us, and went on through the dusky gardens to the beautiful terrace beyond.

The strains of a band floated from the distance. The purple mountains looked down upon us, the moon gleamed like silver in the deep, intense blue above—the sighs of the restless sea came up from the curving shores below. Involuntarily I slipped my hand into Donald's arm, and drew a long deep breath of mingled pain and pleasure.

"Oh, is it not lovely?" I cried, as I stood there on the marble terrace, and drank in with rapture the delights of sense and sight.

"It's no as fair as Loch Fyne," was his reply. "But it's well enough."

CHAPTER VI.

THE WANING OF THE HONEYMOON.

"But sorrow returned with the dawning of morn,
And the voice in my dreaming ear melted away."

"The day comes to me, but delight brings me nane,
The night comes to me—but my rest it has gane.
I wander, my love, like a night-troubled ghaist,
And I sigh as my heart it wad burst in my breast."

"It's well enough!"

That is about the height the Laird's admiration ever reaches.

Whether he thinks it a point of honour to uphold the beauties of his native land as superior to all else he may behold, or is really incapable of admiring anything but his Highland lochs and hills, I cannot say, but he *certainly* will not allow that anything he sees, or over *which I rhapsodize*, is one whit more beautiful.

It is rather exasperating sometimes. I hate narrow-minded people, and I have come to the conclusion that Donald is obstinate in his prejudices, and wilfully one-sided in his opinions.

As I am neither familiar enough with him, nor fond enough of him, to argue or coax him into accepting my views, I generally lapse into silence, and leave him to the serene content which his own seem to afford.

* * * * *

There is no use in making daily entries in my journal. There seems so little to say. We dine, drive, walk, sleep, and, I suppose, mutually bore one another. At least, I can answer for myself.

I am sure I know every landscape of the Corniche Road, every villa between Villefranche and Eza, every curve of the bay, every aspect of blue sky, blue water, and grey olive woods. I think the warm, sunny air, the breezes laden with scents of acacia and rose boughs, make me languid and melancholy. I begin to wonder how much longer Donald intends to stay here, and to ask myself whether my own home could be duller, or more depressing.

For the Laird is strangely unsocial. He rather avoids the society of his fellow man. He seems to have a rooted prejudice against all foreigners, and to consider the men fools, and the women improper.

Now and then we go to the Concert-room at the Casino, but once the music is over, I am hustled away and not allowed a glimpse at the *Salle de Jeu*, or its glittering crowd of fashion and notoriety.

We visit Roquebrune and Eza and Mentone, spend a day at San Remo, and another at Antibes, but I am bound to say I have found them all very much alike, with the exception of Roquebrune, and that certainly is ancient enough, and picturesque and dirty enough, to delight any antiquarian or artist.

The Laird, however, is always grumbling about "drains," and the general unwholesomeness of foreign towns, and he sees no beauty in the dusky roads and the old, dark houses, and the quaint streets, where the old peasant women sit at their fruit stalls, and the flower-girls offer their roses and violets at every corner, and the little brown children tumble over one another's heads and watch with big, shy eyes as the strangers stroll along

So the days glide into weeks, and we have seen everything and done everything, and I at last venture to suggest that we may as well turn our steps homeward.

The Laird agrees readily, and almost rapturously. I suppose he is not sorry his honeymoon is over.

I spend my last evening in wandering through the gardens, thinking to myself (I dare not confess it to my lord and master) that never again shall I probably see so lovely a sight as those dusky, starlit glades, with their subtle, exotic scents and softly gleaming lamps, and the dark violet of sea and sky which forms their setting.

Perhaps, in my heart, I am almost sorry to be leaving this place. Before me lies a life wholly new and strange; new scenes, new faces, new duties. A sort of dread seizes me as I think of all it may mean.

Why was I in such a hurry to marry, why did I not remain as I was?

Already I can see that between my husband and myself yawns a great gulf of dissimilarity—that we have no single taste, habit or desire in common.

And I am so young, and I suppose in all likelihood I have many years of life to look forward to, and yet—well I only know it seems to me that the mainspring of such life is for ever broken, that it will drag on—limp on—with a dreary, if safe monotony, until we part company for ever on this material plane.

An epitaph that I had read somewhere will keep running in my head. It seems ridiculous and out of keeping with this beautiful scene and the gay, chattering idlers scattered about, but all the same I find myself repeating it. It had been inscribed over the grave of one Thomas Price, aged twenty-seven, his wife Mary, aged twenty-five, and his daughter Mary, aged two years.

"Our tyme on earth it were full short,
The Will of God was so.
Affliction sore did fais on us,
So we where forstt to go."

Over and over again the quaint rhymes ring in my ears, here where the sea is sighing against the white marbles of the terrace, and the far-off strains of music float in sudden, fitful melody from the distant rooms.

"Our time on earth it were full short." I suppose it was a short life if they were happy, and yet perhaps

father and mother and child were better off than if one of the family had lingered behind, to battle with the thorns and briars of this work-a-day world.

At least they were together so far as we know. "The will of God was so."

I wonder who put up the inscription? Surely not Thomas or Mary, for they could not have known they were to follow each other so quickly, and that the child would hasten after them to the "Unknown Land," with such willing feet.

Then I thought of the beautiful cemetery with its Gaelic name and its quaint situation, and of my false lover's wooing there, and the joy that had been so brief.

I think to-night I wish myself at rest under the shade of the rowans and beech trees, to-night, when all the beauty and brightness of the life around me seems covered with the funeral pall of my own sad thoughts and sorrowful forebodings.

Sighing, I turn away, and retrace my steps to the hotel. I have said my farewells to garden and terrace, to Monaco, on its dark, isolated rock, and Condamine, with its pretty harbour, and the far, wide stretch of lemon and orange and olive woods.

"I suppose I shall never come here again," I say to myself, and perhaps the home of the dead and gone Grimaldi gains a new and regretful interest to me from the hour I leave it.

For in due course of time we do leave it, and set our faces homewards and Scotlandwards, and so for many days of wearisome travel, and depressing weather, and general fatigue and discomfort, I do not open my journal, or commit to its silent pages any information respecting my life, or thoughts, or surroundings.

In the North again.

How cold, and bleak and dreary it looked to me after the blue skies and sunshine and green woods I had left. How I shivered in my warm furs as I sat in the railway carriage and looked out at the grey, bleak chain of the Grampians, and saw the whirling snow drifting past the windows, and the grey clouds piled in heavy masses in the grey sky overhead.

The Laird was stretched full length on the seat

opposite, wrapped in a thick rug and smoking a huge pipe. He looked comfortable and serene, facts probably due to the sensation that his foot was once more on his "native heath." I had faintly hinted that we might break our journey at Inverness. I so longed to see Grannie's sweet, old face, and hear Bella's cheery voice, but Donald did not respond to the suggestion.

"It is quite time," he said, "that you make my mother's acquaintance, and it will not look just respectful, under the circumstances, that we tarry here with other folk, instead of going to Corriemoor direct."

I therefore said no more, and put the best face I could on the discomforts and fatigues I had to endure.

The train rocked and shook along the rough uneven line, until every bone in my body ached, and my brain felt absolutely stunned.

To read was impossible, and I never could keep up a long conversation with the Laird under the most favourable circumstances. To talk through the din and rattle, and jolting of that fearful Highland railway, was therefore a matter of more than ordinary difficulty. I could only sit there in dumb discomfort, and watch the snow falling over the dismal landscape, and wish in a weak and vain manner that I had stayed in the Riviera for another month.

But the longest day comes to an end, and so does the longest journey, and at length the welcome mandate went forth to leave the train, as we were at the station nearest our destination. Then followed a long, cold drive in an open dog-cart, and at last, in the dusk and gloom of the dying day, I caught sight of my new home.

Miles and miles of moorland stretched around, white with the snowfall. The air was raw and bleak. The gaunt trees looked doubly gaunt, with their bare branches stretched skywards, and laden with snow. I was thankful to take my frozen limbs and chilled small person into an atmosphere of warmth and light once more. The hall was illumined by a blazing fire and the light of many candles. On the walls were deer antlers, and other trophies of the chase, and skins and rugs covered the oaken floor. I caught sight of pictures of *the Laird's* family and clan, evidently dating generations *back*, in kilt and armour, and other strange garbs, and

all looking more or less stern and forbidding in their dark frames. My mother-in-law was standing beside the great open fire-place, awaiting us. A solemn, stately old dame, in rich and rustling black satin and antique lace. Her white hair was plainly braided on either side her brow; her face was wonderfully fresh-coloured and unwrinkled considering her age; the blue eyes were keen and somewhat stern, but their expression softened as they rested on the tired and drooping figure which the Laird led up to her for welcome. "My wife, mother," he said simply, and something in the pride and tenderness of his tone touched me deeply. I felt the tears rush to my eyes, and I trembled from head to foot.

The stately old lady took me in her arms, and kissed me warmly. "Welcome, my daughter," she said, in that sweet, low, drawling voice which is so peculiarly Scotch, and as characteristic—to my thinking—as the accent itself. "I'm sure you're weary after so long a journey. I'll just take ye to your ain room, and ye shall have a sleep and rest before dinner. We can bide an hour for that, eh, Donald?"

"Certainly," said her son heartily. "Only I'll just have a dram to keep out the cold, while you take Athole upstairs. Could you not give her some hot tea for herself, mother? She's almost frozen, poor bairn."

"It is all ready for her," said the old lady, and I was whisked off and taken into a large, comfortably-furnished bedroom, where a big fire blazed cheerily, before which a great old-fashioned couch was drawn up.

My mother-in-law herself assisted me to remove my hat and wraps, and a neat Scotch maid unpacked my trunk, and gave me one of my dressing-gowns, and I then was ordered to lie down on the big couch, and covered up with an eider-down quilt, and tea was brought in by the maid, Flora, and a delicious sense of rest and comfort and warmth stole over my tired frame.

I grew very drowsy, and the old lady noticed it, and left me to sleep till dinner-time.

The Laird came to waken me, but I was so spent and exhausted that he refused to let me come downstairs, so I had dinner sent to me there, and after dinner *retreated to bed and slept* the deep, dreamless sleep of

sheer bodily fatigue, until the maid knocked at my door next morning.

* * * * *

I have made a tour of the house, and been introduced to the old servants, and now am sitting in my own room posting up my journal.

The snow is still falling heavily. The look-out from the windows is desolate in the extreme. But I feel rested and soothed and fairly content. Everyone has been very kind to me. The Laird, too, is far more genial and cheery in his own home than ever I have known him out of it.

I like this quaint old house, with its rambling passages and dark old-fashioned rooms and great fire-places. The old lady is never weary of relating anecdotes and histories of their people, of whose deeds of valour and virtue there seems to be an endless catalogue.

The Laird's own room—study, as they call it—is mainly conspicuous for an absence of everything conducive to, or associated with, that word. It is hung round with trophies of the chase—guns, fishing rods, golf-sticks, curling-stones, stuffed birds in cases, and great eagles and falcons perched on stands and brackets. I have never seen such a room, and he is very proud indeed of it.

My own bedroom is very large, with a deep bay-window at one end, commanding a view of moor and hill and deer-forest. Part of it is furnished like a sitting-room, with writing-table, chairs, couch, work-stand, and very comfortable and pleasant it looks in the ruddy warmth of the fire-light, despite the grey sky and heavy snow-clouds without.

On the whole I feel very well content, though I doubt but the life here will be monotonous enough.

My mother-in-law has somewhat formally proffered me the duties of housekeeping should I wish to undertake them, but I plead inexperience and ignorance, and beg her to continue as she has always done. I am quite content to be second in the household. I can see the old lady is pleased at this, and so no doubt are the servants.

So begins my married life in my Scotch home. Romance is a folded leaf in a book that must never again be opened.

I look on these pages, having made up my mind to

lock them away and forget—if possible—the dreams and the follies and regrets that they record.

One sigh for the youth that was so brief, the love that was so false, the hopes that were so futile.

One sigh—Oh, Douglas, Douglas ! . . .

A tear follows the sigh—it rests on his ~~name~~—the name that has cost me so many tears.

Will this be the last I shall shed for him ?

God grant it. Good-bye, Douglas. . . . Good-bye, Youth. Good-bye, Love.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY OF DOUGLAS HAY.

“Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler—sister woman ;
Though they may gang a keenin’ wrang
To step aside is human.*

What’s done we partly may compute,
But know not what’s resisted.”

YOUTH is headstrong and impetuous. That is no new thing to say ; we have all heard it often enough.

I suppose it was only natural that I, Douglas Hay, scapegrace and ne’er-do-weel as I had always been called, should have consumed most of my hot-headed youthful days in longings to be free and untrammelled, to escape the burden of conventionality, and the boredom of narrow-mindedness, and the mixture of cant and shrewdness, psalm-singing, kirk-going, and money-getting, which to my mind represented my nation, or such of it as had come under my ken.

My mother I had never known. My father was a tyrant in disposition and a miser in habits—my home a dreary and unhappy one, against which I had instinctively rebelled, and which, to my youthful mind, had represented only a place of punishment, fault finding and hardships.

I must frankly confess I never willingly spent an hour there that I could possibly spend anywhere else, and that my father was never sorry to see my back turned on his *demesnes*.

If floggings, and semi-starvation, and sarcasm are good food for bringing up a child, then assuredly I should have been a model of excellence, but as the character I bore in my native place was that of a "born reprobate," I can **only** suppose the treatment signally failed in what it was **intended** to do for me. Pious elders of the Kirk shook their heads as they passed me by. Worthy mothers of families tried the effects of "a word in season," but their idea of "season," invariably clashed with mine, and the seed never sprang up, or took any root worth speaking of.

I went to school, and having a fair amount of ability I managed to acquire as much knowledge as the generality of boys ever do. The masters always said I might have done better, but, as a rule, they are a race niggardly of praise and impossible to please. I made little attempt to win either praise or satisfaction from them, and they reported me to my father according to their judgment and opinion.

Needless to say it differed somewhat from my own.

When school-days were over the question of my future course was mooted, and here again I and the author of my being were very widely opposed in our views. I wished to be a soldier. He would not hear of it, but was bent upon my entering the church. This I resolutely refused to do, and while the battle waged I led a very idle and reprehensible life.

I was fond of gaiety and amusement, I desired above all things experience, and I set to work to gain it in whatever way seemed to me good. Women petted me and were fond of me. I had the talent or facility which makes a young man popular, that is to say I was a fair musician, a good dancer, an excellent shot, and possessed of indefatigable energies and spirits.

The women took me up and the men abused me, between them they afforded me plenty of amusement and occupation. I was as seldom at home as I could help, and the gulf between my father and myself grew wider and wider as time went on, and I was too old to be tyrannized over, and too independent to be bullied.

An old aunt, whom I had never seen, died suddenly and left me about fifty pounds a year. It was not much, but it made me independent of my father, and though

the miser's side of his nature rejoiced at the saving of expense, the tyrannical was displeased at the comparative freedom and independence I could now enjoy.

I went to Edinburgh and to Glasgow, delighted with the new sense of liberty. I made plenty of friends and acquaintances, some perhaps less safe than others, but what cares youth for danger, or risk, or reputability?

I went back to my native town after one of these visits to the capital, and there for the first time I met the Fate that sooner or later overtakes all manhood. I did not at first understand what such a meeting might mean for me. I did not think it was in me to care seriously or deeply for any feminine thing. For their own sakes I am sorry to say they had led me to consider them in a very light and depreciative manner. But somehow this small slip of girlhood, with her wistful little face and big dark solemn eyes, touched some chord in my nature as yet unawakened or recognised even by myself.

She was so innocent, so young, there was something about her so altogether fragile and pathetic, that she seemed to attract love and tenderness as naturally as a child. How easy it was to win her interest, to make that interest ripen into something warmer, deeper, more passionate. The baseness of rivalry was not wanting as an incentive, had I needed such. I could see her cousin Kenneth cared for her from the first, but he was a cold and cautious wooer and it needed little effort on my part to push him out of the field. A more formidable rival, however, arose in the shape of the Laird of Corriemoor, one of the richest and best-known of Highland landowners, and who had fallen, I plainly saw, an easy victim to the little winsome lass who was everyone's pet and favourite.

Even as I write these words the sense of my own baseness and ingratitude underlies them each and all.

She loved me so truly and so deeply, and I—well, God knows, I loved her too, but that did not prevent my behaving as only a scoundrel and a coward would have behaved.

Often I ask myself, why? Even now it is somewhat of a mystery to me. Now, when the wide seas roll between us, and she and I may in all probability *touch hands in love, or friendship, never—never more!*

In these long, lonely nights, pacing to and fro the deck of the ship that bears me further and further away, how often I have thought of her, with what a mingling of regret and sorrow and desire. And yet what could have come of our love but misfortune and unhappiness? Everyone opposed it, and I could not blame them for doing so.

I had sown my reputation years before, by many an ill deed, and careless word, and idle habit. What other harvest could I expect to reap than the one I had gathered in?

Some sudden fit of remorse and disgust with myself, and the influence brought to bear on me by another woman, resulted in an abrupt break between Athole Lindsay and myself.

I knew that woman was unworthy to be named in the same breath with the girl I loved. She was a syren made to snare men's fancies and appeal to their worst instincts. Their conquest had long been to her an easy matter. I read her very clearly from the first, and the reading amused me, as did the pretty, subtle love-making so thinly disguised under the friendly interest and attentions she bestowed on me.

Heaven knows I don't say this out of vanity. I seemed but a boy in years to Mrs. Dunleith, and she affected to treat me as such. What broke down her guard and enlightened me as to her feelings, was her jealousy of Athole Lindsay. One night that jealousy burst forth as a slumbering fire long hidden may do, and then I found myself caught in that whirlwind of passion, reproach, anger, and desire, which some women call love.

The scene was terrible, the more so because unexpected, and by me certainly undeserved. I soothed her as best I could, and, in somewhat cowardly fashion perhaps, made light of her suspicions with regard to Athole. I declared there was no engagement between us, and the announcement seemed to content her. Then, to cut the Gordian knot of my difficulties, and seeing plainly that the Laird of Corriemoor was very much in earnest in his attentions, I took myself off suddenly and without notice or farewell to either Mrs. Dunleith, or Athole.

I went to Edinburgh, and sulked there in smouldering

misery, that longed to vent itself on someone and yet was perfectly aware of its own inability to do so. It had been selfish and self-sought, and I could see no way out of it.

A brave and more unselfish nature would never have set itself to win a young girl's heart and love for no better purpose than its own gratification.

I see that all so plainly now, but I did not see it then, or was it that I needed the sharp touch of sorrow's lash to teach me my lesson?

In a state of wrath, disgust and dissatisfaction, I lingered for a while in Edinburgh, and then wrote to Athole to free her from the obligation I felt I had in some way forced upon her.

I think now my letter must have seemed cruel to her, though I meant it for the best. In the mood I was in at that time, I was not capable of calm or temperate judgment. I set her free, and perhaps only in those long weeks of silence that followed on her part, did I begin to feel how much I really cared for her. Then Mrs. Dunleith appeared on the scene again. But she chose a new *rôle* now.

The syren was laid aside, and the friend took her place. Tender sympathy, warm interest, frank and, cordial companionship—these were all at my service veiled now and then by some word or tone or look which recalled, without alarming, the old memories and the old days.

I should have been more than mortal man to resist the gradual influence that was brought to bear upon my life at that time, when I was most reckless and most unhappy.

I wondered why a woman so beautiful, and so formed to attract men, as Dora Dunleith, should care to waste her thoughts and attentions on me. I made but poor return, Heaven knows.

Yet she never seemed to resent my *brusquerie*, or my coldness. Perhaps, now that she knew her rival was out of the field, she felt she could wait with patience.

An older man might have yielded to the transient and subtle delights such intercourse and society afforded, if only to lull conscience and win forgetfulness. But I only felt irritated and ashamed at my own weakness.

In my love for Athole, there had been purity and

poesy. A sentiment of the soul, a vague delight that made even self-torment a pleasure. It had been something to walk for miles, only to see the light in her window, or catch a glimpse of her sweet face from afar, or even the chance of meeting her in the High Street with her inseparable companion, Bella Cameron. These are the foolish trivialities in which youth delights.

* * * * *

How my head aches, to night! How weary and disheartened I feel. I have been sitting in moody reflection over these pages, writing, and reading, and thinking, and in my heart cursing my folly, and wondering what possessed me to accept Dora Dunleith's proposition to go to Canada to seek my fortune.

What does fortune matter to me? For whose sake should I do battle with the world? At whose hand seek the guerdon of victory, or the soft sympathy that compassionates failure? There is no doubt that some natures need the ballast of another to steady and control them. Disappointment has a deteriorating effect. They plunge into dissipation as a distraction. Billiards, late hours, smokes and drinks, and play, have the advantage of bringing temporary excitement and forgetfulness. Women—more wise, and hampered by worldly prejudices and shut in by that thick-set hedge of conventionality, which the innate weakness of the feminine heart knows as a safe-guard, even if an irksome one—they, as I say, more wisely take to religion, or Sunday school teaching, and are martyrs, in a quiet, unimpassioned way of their own.

Perhaps they are less actively unhappy than we are, but the grey hues of hidden sorrow settle none the less surely over their lives.

* * * * *

How the wind howls to-night. Surely a storm is brewing. I can write no more. I will go up on deck, and see how the weather looks.

After all, it is rather a womanish piece of weakness to commit the incidents of one's life to paper.

But time hangs heavy on my hands now, and I have not yet fraternized much with my fellow passengers.

That is my excuse, though why I offer it to the paper I am rapidly spoiling, I am at a loss to say.

CHAPTER II.

WRECKED !

“ Man is his own star, and the soul that can
Render an honest and a perfect man
Commands all light, all influence, all fate ;
Nothing to him falls early, or too late ;
Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows, that walk by us still.

THE storm was raging frightfully when I stepped on deck. I could scarcely keep my footing in the teeth of the furious gale.

As I clung to one of the shrouds, I saw a figure beside me, occupied in the same endeavour to preserve his equilibrium.

It was that of a man, one of my fellow-passengers, whom I had noticed several times already. The singularity of his face and features, or rather the expression that stamped them, were sufficient to attract observation.

Young enough in years, to all appearances yet the face itself was one strangely impassive, the eyes cold and hard, the mouth drawn into firm lines, its expression bitter and cynical in a marked degree.

The brow was lofty and intellectual, the brow of a student and a thinker, and at rare moments the eyes lost their hardness and indifference, and scintillated with excitement or interest. Now, as I glanced up at him, and saw them in the fitful moonlight that struggled through rifts of cloud, they were absolutely blazing with delight and excitement.

“ It is magnificent, is it not ? ” he said to me, tossing back the dark waves of hair from his uncovered head, and looking like some spirit of the storm in his towering height, and with that strange, pale face, and those flashing eyes piercing the gloom and disdaining the warfare of the elements. “ How feeble and weak after all, is the skill of man against the forces of nature. Who shall bridle the wind, and arrest the thunder-cloud, or steer the lightning flash on its wild flight ? Look yonder at that seething mass. How the white horses toss their manes and gallop over the wild sea to-night ! Ah, is it

not grand, glorious, superb? What a pity that at such a time one cannot resolve oneself into something less material than flesh and blood, and enjoy it as the spirit of the tempest itself might do!"

I looked at him in some surprise. The words were strange, but no less strange was his look and aspect.

"It certainly is a grand sight," I agreed. "But scarcely enjoyable under present circumstances."

"There I differ from you," he said, the clear, resonant tones of his voice sounding distinct even amidst the noise and fury of the blast. "At all times, and under all aspects, nature is to me enjoyable. She and I have been close friends all the years of my life."

"You have travelled greatly?" I suggested, with another glance at the strange face, unyouthful even in its youth, yet with something grand and majestic now in its defiant, fearless pose, and flashing glances.

"Not half as much as I could desire," he said. "That is where life hits one so hard. In youth we are bond-slaves to the possible enjoyments of a future, setting all our energies to work in order to achieve a goal that promises all we deem best. Does age ever fulfil those promises? I doubt it. The years pass, and Time lays a heavy hand upon our spirits and desires, our very nature alters, and the fruition we once upheld as bliss to our fond imaginings, becomes but Dead Sea fruit in our mouths at last."

"You talk very bitterly," I said.

A temporary lull had taken place. The wind blew with less fury, the driving clouds parted here and there to show some gleam of star or moon in the blue depths of unveiled sky. We were still standing side by side, still clinging to the stout cordage as support. The ship sped on over the foaming waters with scarce a yard of canvas spread from her bending masts.

My companion looked down at me for the first time.

"So you think I speak bitterly," he said. "If so, life has been my teacher. I can but speak of it as I have found it and seen it. Who ends it as he intended? Who finds it as he imagined it? Who looks out from any standpoint in the moral, social, or physical scale, and *can truthfully* assert that it is anything but vexation and *vanity*? The wisest man the world has ever known,

id that, and his judgment will pass unchallenged for
l time. Here and there comes a little sunshine, a
tle pleasure, a little hope—but set against them the toil
id weariness, the sorrow and heartaches, the misery
id deception and disappointment, that we raise and
use as we journey along that road from youth to age,
id dare then to say that the little good is not out-
eighed a thousand-fold by the many evils—that the
ps of pleasure are not as a drop in the ocean to the
as of grief. But see, the storm rises again! We shall
ve a rough night of it.”

“You seem rather to enjoy the prospect,” I said,
ancing somewhat enviously at the tall figure and the
arless, defiant pose of the uncovered head, where the
ind played at will amongst the dark, thick locks.

“Yes,” he said quietly, “I am altogether without
ar, and yet I and danger have claimed pretty close
quaintance with each other in my time. I have been
rice shipwrecked, but it has not destroyed my love of
e sea—nothing could do that.”

I felt that I could not agree with him. Indeed, I was
ready cold and chilled, and wet with spray and rain,
id felt more disposed to seek my cabin than to watch
e storm renew its attentions.

I therefore bade my new acquaintance good-night,
id went below, though I must confess sleep was utterly
ossible.

Wide awake I lay in my narrow berth, listening to the
owling wind and the dashing waves, and the tramp of
e sailors’ feet on the deck above. How little there
emed between life and death on that wild ocean, in
at wild night—only a few planks, the weak armament
man against the warfare of the furious elements. I
ought of my strange companion, and wondered if he
ill was on deck, breasting the storm with that un-
unted mien. I almost envied him his supreme enjoy-
ent. I had certainly experienced more fear than
easure at the sight of the raging sea and the noise of
e creaking timbers.

* * * * *

In the midst of my wakeful meditations I was roused
y a fearful crash. I sprang up, and, half-dressed as I
as, hurried on deck. One of the masts had broken,

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and lay half on, half over, the deck, a mass of straining cordage and flapping canvas. The sailors were hewing vigorously at it—foremost among them towered the tall figure of my new acquaintance. His face was still calm and unmoved—his coolness and nerve seemed to encourage the men, and they laboured with a will at their task, until the ship was free of the strain and once more rode merrily over the wild waste of waters.

Five minutes later, however, a fresh alarm arose. We had sprung a leak, and the order was given to man the pumps.

For hours and hours—long after the grey dawn had broken—that weary labour went on. One and all—passengers and crew alike—we gave our willing aid, and again I noticed foremost to help and encourage, and with the strength and zest of two ordinary men, was that strange being who had seemed to me like the spirit of the storm itself.

As time went on the reports grew more and more disheartening—the leak was gaining on us, and the sea was still terribly heavy. The men's faces began to look gloomy, and their energies showed signs of the prolonged strain. The wind had abated somewhat, but the ship pitched and rolled in most distressing fashion in the great trough of heaving waters.

We had been driven miles out of our course, and the captain could only give a guess as to our whereabouts. Till near mid-day they laboured on at a task which grew hourly more hopeless. That the ship must be abandoned seemed a growing conviction in the minds of the men, but I must confess it was with no pleasant feeling that I heard the order given to lower the boats. It seemed to me impossible that any boat could live in such a sea, and the gloomy faces around seemed to echo my conviction.

However, the time soon came when we were left with no other alternative. The leak was gaining on us so rapidly that the pumps were abandoned. Provisions and water were handed into the boats, the passengers collected a few clothes and valuables and waited resignedly for the order to leave the vessel.

The captain, I, and the strange passenger—whose name, I had learnt by this time, was Huel Penryth—were the last to quit the doomed vessel.

We cast off and lay at a little distance, watching her as

rolled in that helpless, water-logged manner from side to side, each moment seeming as if it must be her last. It was a melancholy spectacle, and one destined to be long in my memory. Suddenly she lifted her stern end of the boiling trough, and we saw her bows plunge upward—for a brief space she seemed almost standing right, and I could not resist a shudder of horror as I looked. A moment and the great waves rolled upwards like living things, ready to seize upon their promised prey; then came the rending sound of breaking spars and shivering timber, and she plunged downwards into the homeless depths, and the boiling foam rushed, seething and hissing, over the place that should know her no more.

* * * * *

I looked around after one involuntary exclamation which had escaped us.

A grey sky, half obscured by mist—a waste of heaving water, on which our boat tossed like a cork. That was I saw—that and the pale, grave faces of my fellow-ferers.

“May God have mercy on us!” I cried below my breath; but the hopelessness and the peril of our situation seemed to mock that faint petition as we drifted on through the grey mists and the tossing clouds of foam.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW FRIEND.

“Seldom he smiles—
Or smiles in such a sort
As if he mock’d himself—and scorn’d his spirit
That could be moved to smile at anything.”

* * * * *

“ The state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.”

WONDER if at any period of my life I shall be able to look back upon that awful time without a shudder of horror. I had read of shipwrecks, and peril, and ventures, and enjoyed the excitement of so doing. Reality was a very different thing.

We suffered cold, hunger, thirst—the hourly dread of death, as our frail boat tossed helplessly amidst the angry seas that threatened to overwhelm it—and days

and nights passed on, and our scanty stock of provisions was fast drawing to an end, when rescue came.

We were then picked up by a vessel bound for New Guinea, and there I landed—penniless and friendless—to begin life again as best I could. My papers and letters of introduction to the people in Canada were all lost. I knew that I could write to Mrs. Dunleith and tell her of my misfortunes, but I felt no inclination to do so. I did not wish to ask or receive a favour at her hands.

Through the kindness of the captain whose ship had rescued us, I and my fellows in misfortune were lodged with some people in the town, but, kind and hospitable as they were, I knew that the accommodation could only be temporary.

I took counsel with Huel Penryth, between whom and myself a sort of friendship had sprung up. I cannot honestly say that in my heart I liked him, there was something so hard and cynical about the man, and yet I knew he was brave and enduring, and kind-hearted. Our joint misfortunes and sufferings had proved that. He seemed to like me, and, thrown together as we were, it was only natural that I should explain my situation to him.

He listened in silence, his strange cold eyes fixed on my face, as if reading there what my lips might not choose to reveal.

"Your friend is a woman?" he said quietly, when I had finished.

I coloured slightly, and nodded.

"Perhaps you are wise in not renewing your obligations," he went on. The question is, do you wish her to know that you have been saved from shipwreck, or remain under the impression that you were drowned?"

"It matters very little to me what she or anyone else believes," I said bitterly. "My life or death concerns no one."

"In that case," he said, "throw in your fortune with me. You are young, you have no ties, you should be adventurous. As for me, the world is all the same, and one country as good as another. With hands to work, and brains to guide, a man should never be helpless. *Gold, glory, pleasure*, they are prizes to be won on the *field of enterprise*. Of the first, I have enough and to

spare for both of us. You shall accept as a loan, what I do not even need, or value. Let us go to the New World. There one's energies are not cramped, one's actions paralyzed by an effete civilization, or the tyranny of social distinctions. There man is man, his own value what he chooses to make it—the current of thought a pure and undisturbed stream, not a turbulent river, swollen by the affluents of chicanery, rivalry, finance, and self-aggrandisement. Say—will you throw in your lot with mine? I have long desired a companion, young, free, enterprising. You possess those attributes. On my side, I offer you the half of a fortune I do not need, the results of an experience you yourself lack, and a companionship and fidelity that needs no bond but its own promise.”

He held out his hand. His strange eyes had a warm and kindly light, his face had lost much of its hard and bitter cynicism.

I took the proffered hand. I was, indeed, deeply moved by his words and his evident sincerity.

“So be it,” I said heartily. “For the fortune you offer I accept just as much as bare necessity demands, until I can repay the loan. For the rest——”

“Let the future prove its worth,” he said gravely. “I ask no more. It is settled.”

* * * * *

I cannot set down in detail the events of the year that followed. It was adventurous, wild, hazardous, exhilarating beyond that given to most men of this nineteenth century to experience. My strange friend was one of the most gifted and intelligent beings it has ever been my lot to know. Brilliant, daring, with physical strength that seemed to defy hardship, and a sublime audacity that was absolutely devoid of fear—never was man more fitted for the life of peril and excitement which was ours. My roving tastes were gratified to their fullest extent, and I learnt to dispense with many of the false and foolish habits and desires which civilization has named “necessities.” I learnt to know how few and small are really those so-called necessities. How bountiful is Nature to the seeker and student of her lore, and how poor our wisdom often looks beside her mysteries, *stored up and held close to her silent breast*

from the world's infancy; in what blindfold, blundering fashion we most of us go through life, deaf and heedless to all that does not materially concern our individual interests, and petty ambitions.

I was greatly puzzled by my friend's nationality, and he for long was extremely reticent on the point. He spoke several languages, and all fluently and with ease. He had, from his own account, travelled a great deal, studied deeply, read and thought more than many men double his age, and yet with all that expenditure of thought and study had never adopted any profession, or settled down into any given groove.

I think his intellect was of the militant order, and that he made more foes than friends by the boldness of his opinions and the absolute intolerance he had for all deception or pandering to prejudices. He was enamoured of progress, and the field of research was to him an inexhaustible delight.

We had a turn at gold-mining in Australia, for six months, and his knowledge and skill, added to his great physical strength, resulted in a venture so successful that I, at least, could have commanded independence for life. But the roving fever was in my veins now, and I felt no inclination to realize my fortune and settle down into the tame and mediocre respectability of a citizen's life.

Huel was a born democrat, yet it never seemed to me he could have sprung from the people. He had no vicious tastes either, and possessed a nature too cold and critical to have ever succumbed to the influence or caprice of women. Indeed, his indifference to the sex amused me often, though I knew it was the outcome of a genuine feeling.

"They are only butterflies in the garden of life," he said to me when I argued with him that there might be some good and virtue and gentleness in the sex he so scathingly contemned. "Pretty enough, I grant, in the sunshine and flowers, but useless when sorrow—necessity—hardship demand sympathy, or aid, or intelligence."

I thought then that some deeper motive than he chose to confess had made him adopt such opinions. He had *suffered*, and deeply too, at the hands of one woman ere *he could* thus condemn and despise the whole sex. But

I never attempted to force his confidence. I knew that if the mood or inclination ever took him I should hear the story of his life, and if I was at times curious respecting it, I knew better than to display the feeling.

I had soon discovered that Huel Penryth was a materialist—possessing absolutely no belief in the usually received creeds to which men pin their faith, and by which they establish their various forms of worship. The boldness and frankness, as well as the cold, cruel truths of his unsparing logic, at first rather startled me, but he made no attempt to force his views and opinions on my mind, nor would he ever obtrude them unasked. Face to face with Nature as we were, it was no difficult matter to prove the simple, unerring method of her proceedings in all matters, however small or insignificant.

“It is man who intrudes and upsets, or tries to upset, her work,” he said. “Man, who refuses to be content, and sets his pompous pride and vanity against her simple proofs. Miracles! Why should there be miracles? They were never needed save to terrify or coerce the feeble-minded into recognizing a superior power, which their spiritual tyrants declared to be vested in their own persons. There has always been cause and effect, a rational result for any rational need. Why should the whole laws of Nature undergo a change to give birth to one being more than another? The immutable laws of Life and Death stood from the beginning, framing a necessity, and subject to perfectly natural human desires. As Night to Day, so Death to Life comes as its resting-time after its seasons of helplessness, labour, fruition. Here and there a great enthusiast, or a great theory have produced a fierce sensationalism in man’s mind, and there has sprung up a so-called Religion, which again has filtered through ambitious or dogmatic or superstitious minds, until its origin has been lost in the pomp and splendour that overlaid it, or the petty warfares that stripped it of original purity or simplicity. Religion may be man’s effort to reach a superior Being he recognizes; I cannot see in it the desire of that Being to bring man into touch with, or knowledge of himself.”

“It is characteristic of humanity,” I ventured to say. “There seems to have been always the recognition of a superior power or Being, and the effort to worship that

power in a suitable manner seems to imply that Religion is a necessity, though its forms may be mistaken and liable to perverse and erroneous dealings."

"It is characteristic of weakness," he answered. "The desire to lean on another's strength, and be guided by another's authority."

"But," I argued, "without some form of religion, man would not be governable."

He smiled—that cold, cynical smile I knew so well.

"There you hit the secret of priestcraft, the earliest form of government," he said. "To coerce, it was necessary to terrify—to convince, it was necessary to amaze—to attract, it was necessary to charm—so we have Hell for the first purpose, miracles for the second, and ritual for the last."

"But though the Form is of man's creating, there is some deeper root to religious belief than mere speculation. You yourself grant a Creative force, may not that which is so marvellous be called Divine?"

"I certainly grant that force. One finds it in every analysis of Nature. But it is simply a result of the organic forces, which proceed from one another by various modifications."

"Still," I persisted, "something—someone—must have set that force in motion. Trace it back as far as you may, you still reach that stumbling-block of all theories, 'The First.' Let it be germ, form, force, there has been design in it. The fact of man being unable to comprehend the nature and origin of the Designer seems a proof that that nature is above his own—superior to his mental faculties, and therefore worthy of his reverence. We are mysteries to ourselves; we cannot understand that strange duality which seems compounded of the animal and the god. We can but say, 'We are.' Our own wills have nothing to do with our existence or its termination."

"So, because you cannot understand why 'you are,' you attribute the fact that you exist to a spiritual Being shrouded in mystery and labelled 'Incomprehensible,' rather than to the natural results of organic life," said Huel scoffingly. "The world is crowded with *inutility*, it holds monsters, abortions, things noxious and injurious as well as useful. Why force the respon-

sibility of their existence on a personal Creator, instead of adopting the more rational theory which I uphold? The accidental encounter of many forces has given birth to all forms of life, but only those which correspond to the conditions of their surroundings, survive, and transform themselves, and become perfected by various stages of evolution through which they are compelled to pass. If you demand a Creator, you must allow He is a very imperfect one, otherwise, everything would have been what you are pleased to call Him—perfect.”

“You yourself said that our minds, being on a lower scale, might find it impossible to comprehend their own origin?”

“True; but if the outcome of perfect reason and perfect power, they could never have been incomplete. I know humanity clings to that idea of a superior power, a personal interest in its faiths and feelings—to me, it is the childish folly of superstition; but I grant you that superstition has a strong hold on man, and has been fostered and upheld through the darkest and cruellest stages of history. If I had found that a Personal Superintendence over man’s life averted misfortune, or prevented the ills, and sorrows, and pains, and sufferings, which are as surely his fate as the air he breathes, I might adopt that theory. But as it is, I prefer to believe in the fecundity of matter and the purely natural results of rational natural laws. Let the mind which must bow to a superior will and recognise infallibility in error and cruelty, lay to itself the superstition that pleases it best, and deck its fallacies in any garb or ritual it admires. For my part, I have no faith in theology, nor have I succeeded in discovering any reason for submitting my will and giving up my freedom of thought to the control of any other being, no wiser or more reasonable than myself. Yet that is what Religion would compel me to do; I therefore turn my back on it. My doing so need not distress humanity; if I am wrong, I shall suffer; if they are wrong, they will do likewise. There is the case in a nutshell. Come, don’t look at me as if I were a demon, I shall not attempt to overthrow your beliefs, I promise you. Like to unlike is far better ground for friendship than perfect accord!”

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE BUSH.

"The common growth of mother earth
Suffices me, her tears, her mirth,
Her humblest mirth and tears."

* * * * *
"The world is too harsh with us, late and soon,
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers."

THE first burst of the Australian spring was to me a wonder and delight.

The pale tints, the chill air, the variable climate, of my own native land were a good preparation for the splendour of colour, and the wealth of sunshine, and the almost oppressive fragrance of this new world. The air was laden with the scents of acacias and fruit blossoms, and the rich untrained luxuriance of flowers and creepers decked even the wildest spots with beauty.

We were staying, for a time, at one of the big sheep runs on the Emu River. Huel had made the acquaintance of its owner, and accepted the frank offer of his hospitality with equal frankness.

To me, the change was mightily pleasant, for I had had a rough time of it at the goldfields. Our host was a Scotchman, Robert McKaye by name, who had come out to the colony when quite a young man, and now had amassed a large fortune, and married and settled down there. He had two daughters, Jessie and Janet by name, very bright, pretty girls, and able to ride, shoot, and manage dairy and household in a fashion that would have surprised some of their hothouse-nurtured sisterhood in the old country.

I was delighted with them and their life in general. They were frank, clever, companionable, without the slightest affectation of manner, and had managed to educate themselves surprisingly. They even had a piano, and I won their eternal gratitude by tuning and screwing it up into playable condition. In the evenings I would play and sing the old Scotch airs and melodies and dances for Mr. McKaye, and often have I seen the great tears roll down his rugged sunburnt face as the

familiar words and airs brought back the memories of his own youth and his unforgotten country.

"Once a Scot, always a Scot," is very true. I think no men are so loyal in their attachment to their native land, so tenacious of upholding their nationality, so proud of their ancestry and descent!

That spring-time in the big house by the beautiful river was, to me, one of those resting-places in life which are like a landmark to look back upon in after years. Even Huel grew social and genial amidst those kindly natures, and the freedom and unconventionality of our life with them.

I never heard him scoff at the old Scotchman's habits and opinions, or the tenacity with which he clung to the simple forms of his religious faith.

Perhaps the straightforward, honest nature of the man himself, answered better than any argument as to the worth of that faith, and the reality of that religion.

One evening, we were all sitting out in the verandah, the men smoking, the women working, and the conversation turned upon the old country. I had asked Mr. McKaye if he intended ever returning there.

"Well, I'll no say the thought has not been in my mind," he answered, with that due caution of speech so characteristic of his race. "But," he added, with a hurried glance at the two eager faces of the girls, "there's time enough yet."

"Father always says that," pouted pretty Jessie, the youngest of the daughters. "I'm sure he'd be glad to leave here and see Scotland. He's never tired of talking about it and praising it, and yet he won't ever promise to take us there. I'm sure he could well leave this place in the care of the headman, Robertson. He's as careful and conscientious as anyone could be. We might run over to the old country for a year and look up some of our kin. It's hard to know none of them."

"Where would be the advantage?" asked the old Scotchman gruffly. "Who ever found kinsfolk, or friends either, willing to help one in misfortune, or give one a lift in the world. They're wary enough of approaching you so long as they think you might be asking anything of them. Of course it's another matter when you're *well to-do*. and independent."

"Have you kept up any correspondence or acquaintance with your folk since you left Scotland?" asked Huel Penryth carelessly.

"I'm not a good hand at letter-writing," said McKaye. "Once in a twelvemonth or thereabouts I get a letter or write one. My own father and mother are dead long since—some uncles and aunts and cousins in Glasgow are my nearest relatives. They do not trouble their heads about me. I have one friend who writes pretty regularly—we were at school together, but he stuck to the old country, being more favoured of Fortune than I was. He is a landowner and has a fine place of his own in the Highlands. My folk were only plain Glasgow merchants. Might you know anything of Scotland?" he asked, turning suddenly to Huel Penryth.

"No, I have never been there," he said. "I'm a Cornishman by birth, but I left my native place too young to remember much about it."

I glanced with some curiosity at my friend. It was the first time I had ever heard him voluntarily state anything about himself.

"Aye, they're a fine race," said McKaye. "And it's a fine country too, I've heard."

"It is very beautiful," said Huel quietly and without enthusiasm. "But I've been a wanderer so long that I've no special attachment for any one place or part of the globe. I'm absolutely unpatriotic."

A barking of dogs sounded at this moment, and then the tramp of horse's hoofs and the now familiar "coo-ee."

The girls sprang up in wild excitement.

"The waggons," they exclaimed, "and not before they're wanted. Stores are running low."

We all rose and went out to where the heavy lumbering vehicles were standing,

The bullocks were unyoked—boxes, barrels, sacks of flour, and parcels of all sorts were strewn over the ground, or carried off into the verandah to be opened or stored away until needed. The bullock-drivers were put up for the night, and we were returning to our chairs and pipes once more, when a fresh commotion ensued.

This time it was the arrival of a strange-looking man on horseback, with three or four letter-bags slung round him.

"The mail. The mail!" cried the two girls. "But

how late you are to-night, Dermot," added Janet. "I suppose you won't object to a nobbler, or are you going to put up here?"

I heard a voice with a strong Irish accent informing her that the speaker was bound for another station further up the river—and after due refreshment and some two minutes' rest and gossip he took himself off.

McKaye brought the mail-bag into the verandah and proceeded to open it. He handed the girls some newspapers and magazines. For himself there were two letters. I leant back in the low cane lounge, smoking and watching the scene before me. A lazy satisfied content was the only sensation I experienced. Everything was peaceful, restful, quiet. A soft cool wind brought a delicious sense of coolness and exhilaration. The full moon was shedding lustre over the dark trees and rippling water, the acacias and cactus gave forth a musky fragrance—an orange tree laden with blossoms made the air heavy with perfume.

I watched the brilliant belt of stars in the clear dark blue of the sky. The lustre of the moonlight made a radiance strangely bright and clear. McKaye was able to read his letters with no artificial aid of lamp or candle.

Afterwards how all that scene came back to me! The restful calm, the scented air, the lights and shadows and perfumes—even the rustle of the paper as the girls cut the leaves, and their low laughter and exclamations as they turned over the illustrated pages.

An exclamation from the old Scotchman fell on my ears; I did not pay much attention to it. Presently he rose to his feet and folded the letters together and put them back in their envelopes.

"Good news, I hope," I said carelessly, as I glanced up at his tall wiry figure.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "I was only thinking it was somewhat odd I should have been speaking of the old home and the old friends to-night, and I've just had a letter from the Highland Laird I mentioned—Campbell his name is—Campbell of Corriemoor. He writes to say he's just been and got married. I thought he was a confirmed old bachelor. Well, well, there's no telling what folk may do."

I sat there, quite still, my eyes fixed on the curling *smoke-wreaths*,

"Campbell of Corriemoor?" I said at last, my dry lips seeming to frame the words with difficulty. "I seem to know the name. Who has he married?"

"Quite a young lass, seemingly," said the old Scotchman. "A Miss Lindsay, who was staying on a visit with some I verness folk. We'll, I wish him luck and happiness. Matrimony is always more or less of a venture, especially when a man is getting on in years a bit, and the Laird's far from young now."

I made no observation. What could I say? Had I not always expected it—imagined it? Why should I care now? Voluntarily I had given her up, and exiled myself. Voluntarily thrown away her fresh young love, her tender, trustful girl's heart. If she had learnt to console herself—had accepted a worthier suitor, surely I could not blame her. Yet all the time I told myself this, my heart was heavy within me, and something baser and more selfish would whisper, "She might have waited—had she loved you she would have waited."

Now my dream was over for ever. She had settled her future for herself, and in all probability I had long ago faded from her memory, or only crossed it as a dark shadow—something she regretted and would be glad to forget.

A voice roused me at last. It was that of Huel Penryth. With a start I looked up—we were alone there in the verandah. The Scotchman and his two daughters had gone within. I had been too absorbed to notice their departure.

"I have spoken to you three times. What are you dreaming about?" asked Huel.

"A youthful folly," I answered somewhat bitterly.

"You knew this girl then?" he said in those quiet even tones of his.

I started. "How do you know?" I asked.

"A deduction—that is all," he answered. "I happened to catch sight of your face when McKaye was telling you about his friend's marriage. It was somewhat self-betraying—then you relapsed into gloomy thought—heeding nothing, hearing nothing. I guessed there was something in the back-ground."

I was silent for a moment. I did not feel inclined for *confidences*. Huel smoked on, his eyes looking calmly *and meditatively* at the quiet beauty of the scene.

"It is a pity," he said presently, "that we are all bound to go through that phase of folly at one period or another. But it is the case. I have had mine, you have had yours. There is always a time in a man's life when he is peculiarly susceptible to the influence of women. We act and re-act on one another and give rise to the idea that we are absolutely necessary for mutual happiness. It is nonsense, men have no need of women. Our minds can stand alone, women only have a softening and enervating influence upon us. We *may* strengthen them and awake reason and intelligence—they to us give little or nothing that is useful, or stimulating."

"It is as well no woman hears your heresies," I said languidly. I felt in no mood for discussion or analysis. What mattered it to me now whether women were good or bad, fair or false? That current of life which had set in their direction, once warmly and freely, seemed to have grown chill and languid, and now was flowing into other channels.

"You think," said Huel, in answer to my remark, "that if they heard me they would combat my prejudices. Believe me, the day has gone by for that. I am young in years, but by experience and suffering I could outnumber the lives of two ordinary men. I have learnt many hard truths, but the greatest truth is to learn to stand alone—to recognise self as the law of life and the law of all progress. Beat down all in your path—care naught for your fellows—cease to entangle yourself with responsibilities around, above, below you—and you will win all you set yourself to win. Sentiment softens and subdues—it is a leading rein, perpetually drawing one into side-paths; the man who turns aside loses time and energy. The battle is to the swift and strong."

"Rather a selfish theory, is it not?" I remarked.

"All humanity is selfish. To cease to be so, it must cease to recognise its own importance or its own influence. We live, work, toil, endure, for self and sake of self, though we choose to call it ambition, pride, or affection. No man ever did a good or great action for a fellow-man without some grain of self at the root of the apparent sacrifice or nobility of that action. Look even at martyrdom. It was an individual idea of eternal suffering to be avoided—eternal punishment to be

escaped—that made men and women apparently heroic. They wanted to save their own souls, and they believed they were doing it. Impress upon a man's mind that the amputation of a limb will save his life, or a painful and disagreeable remedy prolong it, and he will adopt your cure. The spiritual side of his nature can be touched to equal heroism if once he is convinced that he has a spirit, and that for its benefit or gain he must endure a brief martyrdom. The floods of superstition flowed with wild and frantic force over men's souls at certain periods of their history. Calm thought or action was made impossible, and mutual encouragement rendered martyrdom a matter of necessity, or cowardice. But it was always personal salvation—and yet future gain—that were of paramount importance. 'I must endure,' 'I must suffer,' 'I must be saved.' There lay the real truth, though posterity has glorified it with high-sounding words."

"You allow very little good in human nature," I said, looking with wonder at his flashing eyes, and pale, calm face.

"I think there is very little," he answered; "and the greater the civilization the greater the amount of vice. Our hypocrisy is preposterous. If we lived up to one single law of the religions we have set up—to one single faith we profess—there would be no crime, no injustice, no poverty and no shame. But no one does live up to outward professions. The king on his throne—the cleric in his pulpit—the soldier who prates of glory—the patriot who pretends disinterestedness—the merchant who trades with secret dishonesty—the law that is a crying disgrace to the justice it professes—each and all are but puppets of their own creation, strutting for their little space of time on their own stage—none daring to be true and honest to their own convictions, and therefore accepting the world as it is, and pretending that what it professes it performs. However, we are drifting a long way from our starting point. You have a sore heart to-night, my boy. Was this girl false to you? If so, be consoled that you learnt the truth early instead of late."

I shook my head.

"The fault was mine," I said. "I—I lost her. It is odd that now the loss is irrevocable I should feel its sting so keenly."

"The wound touches your self-love," he said cynically. "No man likes to feel he is readily or easily supplanted, even in a thing so light and capricious as a woman's fancy."

I rose abruptly.

"You are wrong," I said. "I was never worthy one thought of hers—never; but all the same——"

My voice broke—I could not speak—I could not tell him that for one wild, maddening moment, heart—soul—my whole being—longed with the vain longing of hopelessness to hold that little hand in mine once more, and hear that sweet, low voice say, "Douglas—I love you!"

CHAPTER V.

BITTER-SWEET.

"Now conscience wakes despair
That slumber'd—wakes the bitter memory
Of what was—what is—
And what must be."

* * * * *

THE spring passed with swiftly-gliding step into the bloom and richness of summer. Huel Penryth and I were again at McKaye's station, having visited Sydney and Melbourne in the meantime. But neither of us took kindly to civilized life and its exactions and artifices after our wandering and erratic existence. We had accepted an invitation to spend Christmas with the McKayes, and accordingly the 24th of December found us there.

Great excitement prevailed in the family. It appeared that the girls had at last persuaded their father to take them to the old country, and that they were to leave early in the ensuing year.

They were full of it. We heard nothing else discussed from morning till night. I cannot remember when the first hint or suggestion was thrown out that Huel and I should accompany them, but gradually we ceased to oppose or ridicule the idea, and began to discuss its probability together.

We had plenty of money—we had no ties to keep us here. The McKayes were urgent, and—at last—I found myself confessing that I would like to go back, if only for a short time. I had heard no news of my father since I

left Scotland. That, of course, was my own fault. I had never written to anyone to relate my escape from the wrecked vessel, and no doubt I was believed to be drowned.

It amused me a little to picture the astonishment and consternation that might possibly ensue if I appeared in my birthplace in the new and important aspect of a wealthy man.

How readily my faults and escapades would be forgiven. How excusable they would look under the gilded cover of success. I laughed somewhat bitterly as I thought of it, and thought too, with a longing I hardly liked to acknowledge, of the girl whose soft eyes would once have given me so sweet a welcome.

Would she be much changed? Two years make a great difference in a girl's life—and marriage makes a greater.

Yet I could not picture her a woman. Always in my fancy she lived as the fairy-like, fragile little being, whose wistful eyes had grown wet with tears when I had sung "Auld Robin Gray" that first night we met.

It annoyed me sometimes that I could not forget her, I had always found it so easy a matter to forget other women. And now, try as I might to convince myself I was going home for a hundred different reasons, *one* lurked at the bottom of all—unacknowledged, but known to my own heart; I wanted to see her again. I wanted to know if she was happy, if I was quite forgotten!

Whether the proceeding was unwise or not I did not argue. Once having consented to return, I felt a sense of relief at my own decision, and as Huel was still to be my companion I felt I was leaving nothing to regret behind me.

I had grown strongly attached to this strange man. Perhaps he was not a very safe or a very good companion for me, especially in the impressionable stage of my life, but he had a force and originality of character that I liked.

It seemed strange to me that he had not made a mark in the world, with his many gifts and brilliant qualities.

Perhaps that hidden spring of bitterness, cynicism, *and* disbelief had poisoned the sweeter currents of his *nature*, and now he took a morbid delight in denying all

good in mankind, and upholding materialism as his god, and nature as his religion.

He had not alluded again to that secret of mine which he had guessed when I heard the news of Campbell of Corriemoor's marriage. Only the night before we sailed he said abruptly, "Your home is near Inverness, is it not?"

"Yes," I answered, wondering why he asked the question.

"And where is Corriemoor?" he continued, his eyes searching my face somewhat keenly.

"Oh," I said with indifference, "that is a long way from my part of the country. Indeed, I have never even seen it."

"You know its owner though?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "But not intimately. He was a great personage, and I—a nobody."

"And he has married—married the girl whom you loved. I hope, for her sake, you will not meet." He spoke moodily—abstractedly. I looked at him in surprise. I felt the colour rising to my face.

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"Because I feel afraid of you, and because I once, long, long years ago, knew a man who, like you, threw away the treasure of a girl's love, and learnt, too late, the value of his loss."

"We are not likely to meet," I said coldly. "Even if we were——"

"Ah," he said, with an odd flash in his dark eyes, "do not say that. It argues self-confidence, but not conviction. You have carried a sore heart about with you for many a long day. Your own folly may be to blame, I daresay it is. But do not fancy any obstacle or barrier that ever yet was set up, has acted to men's passions as anything but an incentive. Love may die a natural death of weariness or disenchantment, but no power yet could kill it out of the heart where it had no *right* to live, and no hope of attainment. To love greatly is to be very unhappy, and very hopeless. What is refused to forgetfulness, is only what man's vanity calls fidelity. Were memory curable there would be no such thing."

"It is *useless* to argue with such an unbeliever as you

are, Huel," I said, somewhat bitterly. "According to you, there is no good in anything or anyone, no human sentiment worthy of praise, and no genuine feeling in man or woman, save only their love of self."

"Well," he said coolly, "can you recall any historical or recorded instance of the 'divine passion,' which has not been celebrated for its unhappiness, peril, or tragedy? Commonplace affections I grant may sail smoothly along the sea of individual existence, but I speak of love—the divinest, subtlest, sweetest and most torturing of human passions. It is divine only so long as its object is surrounded by that halo of 'inaccessibility.' Stolen hours, silent dreams, impassioned longings, these alone invest it with the power to uplift our grosser natures. We cease to idealize when we are forced to live the dreary, commonplace of every-day life with that ideal. Habit is the death of romance, and romance is the life of Love. The rose will not bloom when a slab of stone covers it. As the stone to the rose, so is the prose of accessibility to love."

"Then because this girl is lost to me by my own folly on the one side, by human laws of morality on the other, you fancy she will become doubly adorable?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"The veriest Phyllis of the fields becomes a goddess in the eyes of the Corydon who cannot win her. Could he do so, her fair skin would be black and blue with bruises ere six months of matrimonial bliss had flown!"

"Heresy, rank heresy," I said, "there are plenty of happy marriages in all ranks and grades of life. Naturally one's feelings can't be always at high pressure. But to love with reverence, and sympathy, and perfect comprehension, is a very happy state of feeling."

"It is monotonous, and monotony is bound to become wearisome. Love has always been painted with wings, you cannot cage him without detriment to gaoler or prisoner. Granted perfect liberty, passion may still be faithful. Absence, variety, even pain, will keep it alive far longer than success. The mistake of love is that it is almost always unequal. If the woman loves more deeply than the man, she is exacting, jealous, unreasonable. If, on the other hand, his passion exceeds hers, *he* burdens her with equal exactions and suspicions.

He repeats himself *ad nauseam*, and she wearies. Not the sweetest song ever written but will pall by daily repetition. You will find I am right the more you study human nature. The scales are almost always unevenly weighted, no two natures are exactly balanced. One is poor and light, the other deep and strong. One capricious, the other steadfast. One profound, the other shallow. One formed for truth, the other wavering and unreliable. For love to be equal, and that happens in one case out of a million, there must be the most perfect comprehension, the most exquisite sympathy; there must be a likeness, yet a subtle variation, between both natures, a charm which both recognise and are wise enough to preserve without attempting to analyse its secret."

"But most people are commonplace, to use your own words, and all this perfection of sentiment and feeling would be unnecessary and undesired," I said.

"Then let no one blame inconstancy," he answered quickly. "It is the natural result of an attempt to chain sentiment into the dull and heavy harness of every-day life. Here and there it breaks loose, and runs recklessly into a new path of its own. There are plenty of people who win love, but cannot keep it, indeed, do not even trouble themselves to make the effort. Yet those are the persons who make the greatest outcry about morality."

"What would you do?" I asked. "If—if anyone you loved very dearly were false to you? Could you philosophize so readily then over broken vows, and falsified honour?"

I fancied his face grew a shade paler, his lips set themselves into a hard, stern line.

"I hope," he said, "that I should have strength of mind sufficient to recognize the uselessness of reproach or regret. What one cannot hold securely, one must expect to lose. If a man thinks himself too secure of a woman's affection, he is apt to undervalue it, or she believes that he does. He makes the mistake of over-worshipping her, in the first stage of his love, and neglecting her, in proof of his trust, in the second. The third stage is generally a sudden awaking on his part to find he has lost what he fancied to be securely his own. *Rebellion is useless.* You cannot force back an affection

into the old channels, you cannot raise fire from dead ashes. What use to try? I would not, for my part, raise a finger to win back a woman who had once shown me she had ceased to love. Let her go. If she finds herself the worse for her unfaith, she must suffer for it. Fate is inexorable. We make our own punishment, by our own misdeeds. No need to rail and storm at the weak human element which assists us to do both.

"What made you such a philosopher, Huel?" I asked suddenly.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Observation, suffering, and necessity. How old should you think me, Douglas?"

I looked scrutinizingly at the calm face, the worn, lined brow, the dark, inscrutable eyes, the thick waves of hair tossed so carelessly back above the leonine head.

"About thirty-five," I answered.

He smiled. "No, I am forty-two in actual years, a hundred by experience and sorrow. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you my story. I have never breathed it to mortal yet. Confidence is a feminine attribute. Men can exist, and be perfect friends and companions, yet never exchange one secret of their lives. Is that not true?"

"Perfectly true. I suppose we are enough for each other, without going into the background of previous events. Perhaps we are less exacting than women in friendship as in love."

He was silent. I saw the well-known look of gloomy absorption gather in his strange eyes. His memory had wandered back no doubt to that "background" whose shadows had darkened his life for many weary years.

I had learnt by this time to understand his moods and respect his silence.

I said no more then. But my curiosity was awakened more keenly than it had ever been.

What sorrow had so altered his nature and turned it to bitterness and hardness? What secret lay at the root of his apparent coldness and cynicism—his disbelief in all the softer or purer emotions that to most men make up the sum of life?

Had a woman's hand dealt the blow which had turned youth to age, and all the fresh, sweet currents of life to gall and bitterness?

Some day, perhaps, I should know.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEB OF FATE.

"—And reason'd high
 Of Providence—foreknowledge—will and fate—
 Fix'd fate—free will—foreknowledge absolute,
 And found no end, in wond'ring mazes lost.

* * *

Our torments also may in length of time
 Become our elements."

OF the voyage and its incidents there is no need to speak. It was monotonous and fairly pleasant.

I could scarcely believe that two years had passed since I had travelled those same seas and gazed on those same scenes. Two years! They seemed like twenty.

As we drew nearer and nearer to our destination, a strange nervousness overtook me. I avoided the McKayes, I could not bear the light chatter and incessant curious questioning of the girls. Even Huel's companionship irritated me.

When the steamer reached Liverpool we separated. The McKayes were going first to London, but Huel and I had determined to travel on to Scotland at once.

We rested at Edinburgh and I telegraphed from there to my father, informing him of my speedy arrival. I knew him well enough to feel assured the news would not excite or please him. I wondered whether he had believed me dead all this time. It was while at Edinburgh that the first thought of Mrs. Dunleith flashed into my mind. Should I call and see whether she was at her old address? After all, I owed her some such attention, considering her interest in me and the terms on which we had parted.

After dinner, that night of our arrival, I asked Huel Penryth's advice on the subject, telling him frankly how matters had been between her and myself, and that she had furnished me with those letters of introduction to the people in Canada which I had lost in the shipwreck.

"I think it would be only polite of you to call," he said. "Suppose we stroll round there to-night? It is not a conventional hour for visiting, but possibly she will *excuse that.*"

"I hardly think she will be in Edinburgh," I said. "Most probably she has left, or is travelling about, she never cared to stay long in one place. However, we will go and see for ourselves. You must come in and see her," I added. "I should like you to meet, she is a woman who has always puzzled me a good deal. I fancy she has had a very unhappy past. She is reckless, but not bad. A very kind-hearted woman, but liable, I should say, to be led aside by impulse. Not a favourite with her own sex at all."

"I would rather not see her," he said. "I am no friend to the sex, as you know, and a woman of her type would be particularly obnoxious to me."

"But as a favour to me, Huel," I urged.

He flashed a keen glance at me. "Are you afraid of a *tête-à-tête*?" he said. "Well, a third person is decidedly a barrier to sentiment. But it will be trying, will it not?"

I laughed. "For me—no. I had never any sentiment, as you call it, for her. She was one of those women who could be very good company to a man, smoke, drink, laugh and jest, all *en bon camarade*, but that was all."

"A widow, you said?"

"Yes. I never heard her say so, but indirectly she always led me to believe it."

"I think you were fortunate in escaping an entanglement," he said abruptly. "She is the type of woman to be dangerous, where her passions are concerned."

"Oh, there was nothing so serious as that," I said lightly. "Her fancy for me was but a very light and passing one. Besides, I was a mere boy, years and years younger than herself."

"And you have not written, or held any communication with her since you left her two years ago?"

"No. Do you think it advisable to resume the acquaintance?"

He shook his head doubtfully.

"I will go with you," he said, at last, "and I will see her before answering that question."

* * * * *

The moon was shining brilliantly over the picturesque extent of Princes Street, as we left the hotel and turned in the direction that had once been so familiar to me.

Huel Penryth stood silent for a moment contemplating the scene with grave admiration.

"One has read of it so often," he said, "I must confess to being a little disappointed when I first saw it. But now it is deserving of all the praise lavished upon it. What a marvellous alchemist is moonlight."

Indeed the scene was very beautiful. The gardens, sloping to the bottom of the valley, were full of lights and shadows. The opposite heights, crowned with the quaint houses of the Old Town, lost all the ugliness and gloom which the day's cruel candour would so plainly reveal. The famous Castle towered above on its rocky perch, every turret and tower standing out distinctly in the pale, clear light.

"Most feudal castles are alike," said Huel, as he walked on, "but I grant this one of your capital is unique in its position. You have a background of park, hills, sea—and at your feet a town modern as the veriest Philistine could desire. Certainly it is very beautiful. I suppose you feel a Scotchman's pride in it all. For my part I never could see why the mere fact of being born in a place invests it with a halo of superiority over all other places."

"Not superiority—only a deeper interest or attachment," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I am too cosmopolitan for that, I fear. I suppose few places in the old country are more wildly and grandly beautiful than my old home on the Cornish coast, and yet I never care to re-visit it."

We were opposite the Royal Institution with its graceful twin structure, the National Gallery, breaking the sweep of the public gardens. How long ago it seemed to me since I had seen them. A strange chill touched my heart as involuntarily I paused and looked at them once more. A sense of impending trouble or misfortune, for which I could not account, laid its cold pressure on brain and nerve, and seemed to warn me against the errand on which I was bent.

I shook off the feeling with an effort. "Come—let us go," I said. "I am afraid we are very late for a call as it is."

* * * * *

Mrs. Dunleith had rented a furnished flat when I was last in Edinburgh. Thither we now bent our steps.

We toiled up the cold, white, general staircase, and rang at the third floor.

The servant announced that Mrs. Dunleith was staying there, and was at home.

She conducted us into a small ante-room, and left us there while she went to inform her mistress of my name.

Ere a moment had passed, I heard an eager voice, the rustle of feminine skirts, then the door was thrown hurriedly open. A vision in pale amber silk, clinging in soft folds to the lissom, slender figure—dark eyes, eager, lustrous—white hands outstretched, a well-known voice. "Douglas!—can it really be you?" Then—

It was not my figure that rose to welcome her, it was not my face that turned her bright and eager one to cold, grey, death-like horror. It was not word or voice of mine that with one single word cut short her greeting. No, it was Huel Penryth's. Swift as thought he had sprung forward and faced her, and she—meeting his gaze—seemed frozen into stony terror. I saw her shiver and recoil—I heard the low gasp of fear from her white lips. Then she staggered blindly forward, and fell almost at my feet—senseless.

I raised her hurriedly, and laid her on the couch.

Huel stood there motionless—his arms folded, his dark face set in hard and cruel lines.

"What is it?" I cried in astonishment. "Do you know her?"

He looked steadily at the motionless figure, the white face, the closed eyes.

"To my bitter cost," he said.

* * * * *

CHAPTER VII.

A DISCOVERY.

"Then black despair,
The shadow of a starless night, was thrown
Over the world in which I moved alone."

I HAD never seen on the face of any human being such an expression of hatred and contempt as that which flashed over Huel Penryth's usually calm, grave features.

I stood there silent and dismayed, as one feels in presence of some great tragedy,

That he should have come from the end of the earth
to meet the woman who had made life bitter to his youth !
Truly Fate works strangely !

I looked from him to the white face and senseless
form on the couch. Neither of us had made any effort
to restore her senses.

I was too startled, and he—I imagined—too embittered.

"What shall I do?" I said, at last. "Ring for her
maid? Do you wish to stay?"

"I must speak to her," he said abruptly. "But for her
own sake, spare her the humiliation of your presence. Wait
for me in the street below. I shall not detain you long."

I gave one more glance at that still and motionless
figure, and then left them together.

Outside in the quiet street I paced to and fro for a
very long time. My thoughts were busy with con-
jectures. All the bitter speeches, the cruel truths,
the unsparing sarcasms hurled at the sins and frailties of
women by Huel Penryth, came back to my mind.

And this woman was the cause.

Involuntarily I traced back my own acquaintance with
her. With calmer brain and more critical judgment than
my hot youth had known, I went step by step along that
path of seeming triviality which had ended now so
strangely.

I remembered the subtle hints, the little bursts of
mocking laughter—the fanciful caprices—the faint
jealousies—the thousand and one arts and witcheries
which this woman had used so unsparingly.

She had hated Athole Lindsay from the first, and I
remembered the girl's same instinct about her—strange
that women are so keen, and detect a rival where a man's
coarser nature sees no harm or danger.

A thousand things that she had said or insinuated
respecting youthful love, boyish infatuation, the folly
and imprudence of long engagements, the selfishness of
early claims in face of more advantageous alliances
—those spider-threads of mischief and malice which I
could have once brushed away so easily, but which I had
foolishly allowed to weave their web of entanglement and
misunderstanding about me—all these came crowding
back to my memory as I paced to and fro in the quiet
moonlight.

Above my head the stars shone in the soft blue arc of the heavens. The solemn beauty, the intense stillness, seemed a rebuke to the stormy passions and cruel feuds of men. I wondered what was passing between those two in the room above. Did Huel Penryth hide some brute element of jealousy and savagery beneath that calm exterior. The look that had flashed over his face when he saw Dora Dunleith, had startled me by its revelation of fury and pent-up hatred. In that instant the man's inner nature seemed to flash out in a rebellion against long years of repression and restraint. The torments of a soul whose yearnings and faith had been pierced through and through by some sword of anguish, had burst forth at last into outward expression.

I felt sorry for the woman, who would wake from her sleep of unconsciousness, and face at last the retribution of garnered years.

Sorry, and somewhat afraid too, though I well knew Huel's extraordinary power of self-restraint.

How long he was—how long. He had told me to wait but a few minutes, and already half an hour had passed and there was no sign of him.

* * * * *

Another quarter of an hour, and still I kept my lonely vigil in that street, and still Huel did not appear.

Wearied and disturbed I had almost resolved on returning to the hotel, when at last he made his appearance.

I went eagerly forward but the look on his face hushed the question on my lips. Its white savagery, the gleam of the dark eyes, the set fierce sternness of the mouth, all spoke a tale of passion and wrath more plainly than any words.

He walked along by my side apparently unconscious of my presence. From time to time his lips moved. Strange disjointed words fell from them.

"When a mortal delivers himself to the Powers of Darkness he yields the citadel of his being to the guard of its direst foes . . . I made the compact; to-night might have set its seal . . . Why did I hesitate? Are those who rob human life less murderous than those who steal from mind and soul their youth, and faith, and purity . . . Avenge the evil they say to me—But how? Shall I take the life that is at my mercy, or spare it for further

ill doing . . . Chaos, storm, darkness—my soul is engulfed in the maelström of its own passions. The voices I hear to-night are only those of fiends and tempters. . . .”

“Huel,” I said entreatingly, and laid my hand on his arm. He stopped and faced me abruptly. “Is it you, Douglas?” he muttered in a confused, dull manner.

I drew him into the quiet gardens and, still keeping my hold of his arm, besought him to calm himself. He lifted his hat and shook back the dark waves of hair from his brow with an impatient gesture.

“Calm—peace,” he muttered, “they are not for me. The moral harmony of my nature has long been tuned to discord. I believe no good of man or woman—to-night a murderer’s soul is all that is left to me . . . all—all!”

“You—oh, God grant you have not killed the woman,” I faltered in accents of horror.

The mockery of his harsh laughter fell on the still, night air.

“My hands were at her throat,” he said. “I saw the black marks on the fair white skin that once in youth’s madness I had kissed with love’s wild rapture. . . . God! what fools men are? When shall we cease to deify those fair images of beauty, unknowing the whited sepulchres they are. Human animals, creatures of prey, hiding under supple skin and velvet sheath the treachery that springs on its victim, the tiger-claws that wound them to the death. Like tiger and serpent they ravage and destroy, and like animal and reptile they know no pity and suffer no remorse!”

I let him rave on. I felt bewildered and alarmed at the sudden change in the cold self-controlled being I had known so long. His wrath lived less in the spoken words he muttered than in the frenzied gleam of his flashing eyes, those portals to his strange nature, in the utter uprooting of all the strength and calmness that had so characterized his face.

I walked silently beside him, reflecting with some irony on the uselessness of man’s philosophy until he can assure himself he is utterly and entirely separated from earthly ties. Sorrow, treachery, misfortune will always find human soil for the sowing of their inexhaustible seed. He, the cold dead tree of human life, proud of

that very deadness and vaunting its inability to put forth again one single shoot of love or faith or human desire, had yet regained through suffering the power of feeling—had not, even through years of abstinence and indifference, learnt to break those fibres of passion and pride which bind one nature to another, and connect their lives, actions and desires with the intimacy of mutual interest and association.

* * * * *

"Where are we?" cried Huel Penryth, suddenly starting as one in a dream.

So absorbed had we been in our thoughts and emotions that neither of us had paid much heed to where our footsteps wandered.

When he spoke we were standing on the summit of Arthur's Seat, looking down from its height on the beautiful city below. The white splendour of the moonlight fell over dark Holyrood and the grim and dusky buildings of the Old Town. To the south-east the loch of Duddingston gleamed like a silver mirror, and the little village itself lay hushed and calm in the peace of the quiet night. The ruins of St. Anthony's Chapel stood out bold and clear on the broad shoulder of the hill. The sound of the water rushing from its spring in the rock behind the hermit's cell, was the only sound that disturbed the stillness.

We stood there and contemplated the scene for long, neither of us speaking. At last Huel turned to me—a deep sigh almost a groan burst from his lips.

"Nature rebukes me," he said, his voice shaken and softened by intense feeling. "I hear her. . . I am calm once more. After all my lessons, after all my boasts, to think that I could be moved to such a display of evil feelings and vengeful desires! But it is over now. . . The storm rages in a higher sphere, apart from physical wrath and vengeance. It is in my brain . . . A field of destroyed faith and dispelled illusions. I set myself apart from humanity long long ago. Why did I suffer the memory of past wrongs to sting feeling to life again? . . . It was the struggle of philosophy against despair; no excuse, no reason, no argument. I have declared man to be master of Nature and master of himself. . . Alas! how weak he proves when trial comes!"

He folded his arms across his chest. His head sank

as if in sudden self-abasement. Wonderingly I had followed him through every phase of every changing mood, waiting patiently till passion should have exhausted itself—as, fortunately for humanity, all strong emotions must exhaust themselves in course of time. His face looked deadly pale as the moon-rays fell on it. The reaction of feeling centred itself now in a strange, almost pathetic humility of expression, the humility of a great strength finding itself but a great weakness.

He who had ridiculed feeling as childish, and anger as unphilosophical, had now experienced each emotion in turn and abandoned himself to their sway unresistingly.

He lifted his white face at last, and it looked almost unearthly in its solemn calm.

"It was Destiny," he said. "It could not be avoided. Listen, Douglas—for the first time in my life I unseal my lips and give their secret to another. Perhaps, had your fate not linked itself with mine, your hand not led me to her presence, I should have never spoken these words. Seal them into silence, respect the weakness that made its vaunt so triumphantly, only to know itself the sport and slave of temptation after all."

He drew me down on the rough stone beside which we stood, and there in the midnight solitude of the hermit's hill, I heard the story of wasted passion and wilful wrong that had laid waste this strange man's life.

CHAPTER VIII.

HUEL PENRYTH'S CONFESSION.

"A love that took an early root,
And had an early doom."

"Deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O death in life! the days that are no more."

"I HAVE told you I am a native of Cornwall. For a century back my people were born, lived, and died there. My earliest recollections are of a sea coast, wild in its grandeur, and as terrible in storm as it was beautiful in its serene peace and stillness. My father was owner of some great slate quarries and mines, and was

accounted a person of great importance. I had no brothers or sisters; my childhood was a somewhat lonely one. To this fact I owe, perhaps, a tendency to romance and a passion for solitude. All around me fostered such feelings. The legends of the country, the wildly picturesque surroundings, the never-ending beauty of combe and cave and valley, and height, and the storied lore of Tintagel, whither I loved to wander and dream whole days away. My father I seldom saw; my mother had been an invalid from my birth. My education was carried on in a somewhat desultory fashion. I went to school three or four days in the week. In the winter, when the weather was bad, I stayed at home engrossed with my books. I read much and at random. There was no one to heed or direct me. When I was about fourteen, a relation of my father's came to live with us, a strange and eccentric being, old, bent, bowed down with infirmities of age, but with an intellect vigorous and keen as it was subtle and dangerous. He attracted me strangely, and despite the vast difference in our years, he showed a greater preference for my society than for that of any other inmate of our household. To this man I owe an extraordinary amount of knowledge that I could not have acquired at that time from any routine of teaching. He had been a student of Nature, a professor of astrology, knew something on all subjects connected with physical science, and possessed a vast store of occult lore that terrified while it allured me into following its mythical speculations, and weird theories. Amidst such surroundings, and under such influences, it is not to be wondered at that I was somewhat different to most youths of sixteen. At this time I had my first grave difference with my father. He was naturally anxious that I should make myself acquainted with the details of his business, but I had an extreme aversion to the dull mechanical routine, the noisy machinery—the splitting, trimming and polishing of the great blocks, yielded by the slate quarry. To me it was all hideous, noisy, repugnant. I had seen the works often from my very earliest childhood. The great rock rent *and torn* asunder for sake of its unexhausted hoards; *the engines and cables, and various machines for carry*

ing the materials to the heights above. The yawning depths of the pit, the immense masses of *débris* piled together, and left as useless after the labour of years, all those inventions by which Man wrested the spoils of Nature from her breast, and turned peace and beauty to noise and turmoil and hideousness for sake of his own gain, were familiar enough to me. When my father made the discovery that I was old enough to learn something of the business, to which he and his father before him owed their wealth and importance, I gave him to understand, that I would as soon pass my days in a torture-chamber. At first he was astonished, then indignant, and finally gave me to understand that I should have one year more of 'idleness,' as he called it, in which to make up my mind and acquaint myself with the works and their management—if, at the expiration of that period, I still determined to have nothing to do with the business, he should adopt a distant relative and give him the place intended for me, and I might go out into the world and seek my own fortune, unaided by the wealth or influence I had voluntarily forfeited. It was an arbitrary decision, but then the world tells us that the fact of parentage is to many minds only a reason for tyranny and moral oppression; as if the fact of begetting the body gave any right to rule or coerce the mind! *That*, at least, is an independent heritage. None may shape or form it. None may decide its bent or inclination. It is not man's gift, and therefore, not under man's control. I tried to make my father understand this, but he simply grew enraged at my audacity, and would not listen to my arguments."

"Our cases are not unlike," I said, as Huel paused in his narrative. "Though I must confess you present the duty of parent and child in a novel light. As you say, the *fact* of parentage seems to have always been a sufficient reason for both mental and physical rule. Body and mind are expected to be in equal subjection, even to the most irrational tyranny."

"But if you reflect on the subject," he said, "you cannot help seeing how young minds diverge from rule or pattern set before them. How a child develops talents, abilities, inclinations, totally at variance with *those of its physical procreators*. If the mind, temper

and inclination were inherited in the same way as feature, form and colouring, every family would keep on reproducing itself to monotony. But very little observation points out the wide difference between the mind and the body that we suppose to be dual gifts of heredity. Indeed, were it not the sole effort of years of discipline and coercion, when we are in the malleable state, to make us resemble our parents, we should be even less of 'copies' than we are."

"I think you are right," I said, thoughtfully; "but," I added, laughing in spite of myself, "what a revolution your views would create in all well governed orthodox households. Why, there would be no such thing as discipline."

"I beg your pardon. There would be a much wiser and more beneficent form of discipline; one that recognized diversity of character and honoured genius, that strengthened weakness and guided strength—that no longer pursued the same form of rule for each member of the family, but had the sense to discriminate between them, and to know that mental gifts and character are the result of some mysterious force working from the root and resistless in its work—not the mere accident of birth and surroundings. But I am diverging. I have traced back this page of my boyhood to give you some idea of how my youth was affected by its surroundings. I come now to this probationary year appointed by my father, a year destined to stand out for ever in my life with its records of joy, woe, shame and suffering. Love, the love of youth is a magic wand, striking water from the rocks of the hardest and most prosaic surroundings, turning the darkest and driest soil into a flower garden of beauty and promise. I—fostered on romance, with little knowledge of the realities of life, with passionate and uncomprehended cravings for the beautiful, the imagined, the unknown—I—I met youth's common fate and with youth's common folly accepted it as a divine gift. I loved. How we met, who she was, whence she came, matters not. She had all her sex's cunning and coquetry. But to me she was Hebe in her virginal youth, Psyche in her beauty and grace; she was only a passing visitant, a being, so it seemed to me, from another and more glorious sphere,

content to pause in this desolate region, and glorify it with such grace and loveliness as I had dimly dreamt of. We met, by dawn, by night, in hours of sunrise and moonrise, by wild heights and in fern-haunted coves, dusky with sombre shade of oak and beech, sweet with sounds of ever-murmuring water. Who knows my land at all, knows well those silver trickling rills whose ceaseless music gladdens the summer's day, and the tender dreamy stillness of the night. I showed her every fairy cove I knew so well, carpeted by white and shell strewn sands, beautiful with wonders of sea and shore—worthy to be haunted by mermaids of fabled beauty—though indeed it seemed to me that never maid of land or sea was worthy to compare with that radiant and gracious presence which made all my life's glory and delight . . .

“Oh, Youth! how we laugh at its follies in the latter-day wisdom that trial and disillusion and experience only too surely bring; yet how in our heart of hearts we envy its pure dreams and glorified faiths, which once lost can never be regained through all life's span of years! . . . Well, I drank my cup of folly to the dregs. My dream became reality—I loved her, wooed her, won her—rising heavenwards in varying moods of transcendent bliss. I confided my secret to one person only—the strange old being who had been so dangerous a teacher. He was not sympathetic—age seldom is—such age as his could only look upon my rapturous expressions as blossoms of an exuberant fancy, destined to fall soon enough from the tree that was so proud of bearing them. In a way he was our friend, and my father being at this time absent from home, I took advantage of the fact to travel to Launceston, and there was married to Dorothy Tolverne. She was supposed to be there on a visit to some old school-mate. Indeed, long afterwards—when I was cool enough and rational enough to remember facts and circumstances—I recollected that it was she who made most of the arrangements, and planned with consummate skill, and secrecy, and assurance the whole details of the elopement. The next thing was to break the news to my father, and this my old friend had promised to do. A few weeks drifted by. I was too happy to heed the passage of time or *trouble my head* about my father's silence. My wife

often questioned me as to his wealth and my position with regard to it. She seemed certain that he would forgive us, and that she would return to Penryth and queen it there as one of the richest and most important members of Cornish society. Her pretty airs and graces amused me. I had no social ambition and little regard for wealth. The old mansion, grey with age, and with its ivy-crowned tower and porch, and its quaint gateway and gardens, was dearer to me from history and association than from any importance it might possess in the eyes of the neighbourhood. But Dorothy held different views.

"At last the long expected letter from my father arrived. Whatever my fears or anticipations might have been, the reality far exceeded them. A few stern, curt lines conveyed to me the information that he considered my conduct in the light of an unpardonable affront. That as we were both under age, and had married without parents' consent and by means of false representations, our union was not legal and he refused to consider it as such. If I would come to 'my senses,' give up this girl—beneath me as she was in birth and station—accept his offer of a place in the works, and return home in a penitent and proper frame of mind, he would consent to receive me. Failing to do this, we were to be strangers henceforth, and under no circumstances would he assist me or acknowledge me. I was aghast when I read this letter. I knew I was wholly dependent on my father, and I had not expected him to be so severe upon me. Silently I handed the letter to Dorothy. She perused it, her face changing from red to white as she took in its cold, unsparing insults.

"Then came a scene for which I was totally unprepared. Tears, reproaches, accusations followed sharp and swift. She accused me of purposely deceiving her; she had imagined I was rich, my position secure, and now she learnt that I was absolutely penniless and dependent. She said other things, too, more cruel and painful to bear, but I tried to excuse them in her natural indignation.

"Well, I am not going to dwell upon this time or the events that followed sharp and swift as stroke of cleaver. *My castle of cards soon fell about my ears.*

"Two months dragged along, embittered by my wife's

growing coldness and unconcealed dislike. Our small stock of money was exhausted. I tried to get employment, but the remuneration was wretched and the work most unpalatable. Then, at the end of those two months, I learnt that the wife I had so adored was not only indifferent but false to me. Without hint or warning she left me one day, in the company of a military man, who had been staying for a short time at Launceston with his regiment. She wrote a brief note stating her intentions, and declaring that she had never considered herself legally married to me since she had read my father's letter. The best thing I could do was to set her free—if I had any doubts as to my claim on her—and then return home and make it up with my people. She was madly in love with this officer, and he intended to marry her as soon as I gave her up and freed her by law, which I could easily do. . . .

"That is all my story now, Douglas—the bald, hard facts. The woman I met in your presence to night is the woman who wrecked my youth and made sport of all its promises and hopes. She is only an adventuress now, and a dangerous one. She says her lover left her two years after her elopement. A few years later, she married an old and very wealthy merchant, who died and left her all his money. I told her that the marriage was illegal, and have left her in terror as to whether I am going to proceed against her for bigamy. It is a poor revenge after all, but when a man's lower passions are aroused he is but a mean and craven thing; all loftier instincts sink into that abyss of fierce anger, broken pride, outraged honour. I wonder I did not kill her!"

His voice had sunk into muttered and discordant tones; his face looked dark and evil in the white moonlight. Abruptly he rose and swept the thick, dark hair from off his brow with an impatient gesture.

"Come," he said, "let us leave this place. I cast her out of my heart long ago—it cannot be more difficult to cast her out of my memory now!"

CHAPTER IX.

RECALLED MEMORIES.

" Oft in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me ;
The smiles, the tears
Of boyhood's years,
The words of love then spoken."

THE next day, we left Edinburgh and set out for the Highlands. Huel had, to all appearance, recovered his composure, and was outwardly the same calm, impassive being I had so long known.

He spoke no word of the events of the past night, nor did I allude to them. We had the carriage to ourselves, and smoked all the way, now and then exchanging a remark as to the scenery ; but even Killiecrankie's famous pass evoked no enthusiasm in my companion's mind, and the long, bleak chain of the Grampians he called " a hideous desolation."

The afternoon was closing in when we reached Inverness and drove straight to an hotel. Mindful of my father's peculiarities, I deemed it wiser not to seek hospitality for myself and my friend at his hands. After some refreshment, I proposed to Huel that we should walk over and see the old man, and he consented at once.

The evening was chilly and gloomy, with a damp raw mist stealing up from the river, and the little town did not look its best.

Huel shivered as he crossed the bridge and looked back.

" I am not impressed with your climate, Douglas," he said ; " it is depressing in the extreme."

" You are not fortunate in your present experience," I said. " But we certainly do have a great deal of rain and mist up here ; it comes of being so near the hills, I suppose."

I felt somewhat melancholy and depressed, myself. Every step was fraught with recollections. It seemed to me so long ago since those boyish days when I had lived here. So long ago since I had walked beside the

river with Athole Lindsay—so long since that parting, when the little proud, hurt face had looked so coldly back to mine, and the forgiveness for which I pleaded had been withheld.

My thoughts would return to her, try as I might to rebel against their thralldom. Was she happy in her new life I wondered? Could she really care for one so cold and staid, and so much older than herself as was the Laird of Corriemoor?

In some selfish unworthy manner I almost hoped she was not happy. I kept telling myself that if she had but waited I should have come back to her, repentant, wiser, more worthy of her love than was the hot-headed boy she had known three years ago. My heart felt strangely sore and troubled as one after another came the familiar landmarks. There dark *Tom na-Hurich* frowned in the dim light, and westwards again, Craig Phadric towered in solitary grandeur, and fields, and meadows, and woods met my eyes once more, unchanged save for the difference of season.

The mist lifted slightly as we reached the open country, and faint gleams of starlight showed at intervals between rifts of parted clouds.

"You are very silent," said Huel Penryth. "Where are your thoughts? I need not ask though. I am no stranger to the pain of recalled memories."

"Yes," I said. "I was back in the past. One wonders that Time plays such strange tricks with one. Away from here, those two years seemed a lifetime—now, I could believe it was only yesterday I stood here and watched the sun setting over that hill yonder."

"Do you intend staying long in Scotland?" he asked presently, "because if not, you might come with me to my Cornish home. I have not re-visited it since I left."

"Was your father reconciled to you?" I asked with some hesitation.

He shook his head. "No, and he died very suddenly, before he had time to alter his will, so I inherited everything. I put the whole business into the hands of a manager, a man who understood it, and on whom I knew I could depend. I have never been near the place since. I suppose I am what the world calls 'wealthy,' but I prefer my wandering life to any routine of civilization."

"Some day," I said, "you will grow tired of it."

He shook his head. "I think not. There is something Bohemian in my nature. I dislike all conventionality. Besides, I could not endure the boredom and narrow-mindedness of English country life. The perpetual gossip and tittle-tattle, the prying into and interference with one's affairs. I never could understand why, in small towns, people take such an overpowering interest in all one does and says. Things that don't concern them in the very least."

I laughed somewhat bitterly. The days were not so long past since I had suffered from backbiting tongues and impertinent interference, garbed in kindly interest, and as such, hiding, or seeming to hide, their barbed insults.

"Oh" I said, "if it were only 'interest,' one might find excuse, but it is the amount of conjecture and falseness, that is so trying."

He shrugged his shoulders with the old petulant gesture I knew so well.

"It is a wide field," he said. "First, curiosity and self-importance lead the way; then come suggestions, hints, surmises, tending to conclusions, probable, but not actual, and decisions more or less uncharitable. Yet what cobwebs they are in reality, idle threads spun from idleness, flippancy, ill-nature, as the case may be. But they carry their sting, none the less."

"It is strange," I said, "how cruelly one human being will stab another to the heart with an idle or unkind word. Yet that same individual would shrink from inflicting bodily pain, even on a dumb animal."

"We are odd compounds of cruelty and kindness," said Huel. "And it is the blundering of fools that too often makes a wise man's suffering. Strange, but true. When you look out on life from a field of experience and sorrow, you can afford to smile at the follies, but in their day they have hurt you and the pain is hard to forget."

Then we relapsed into silence—each busied with his own thoughts and reflections, until we reached my father's house.

* * * * *

Not a ray of light greeted us from the old building of grey stone, standing solitary and grim in its neglected garden.

I knocked at the front door, which, after some delay, was opened by old Janet. She held a candle in her hand, which flickered wildly in the draught and threw strange shadows on her old, withered face and frilled cap-border, and the patched and darned black gown she wore.

"Well, Janet," I said cheerily, "you see I've come back again. How are you and how is my father? Is he in?"

She drew back into the gloomy little hall, and set down her candle.

"So it's yoursel,' Mister Douglas," she said. "Are ye no fair out o' your wits to come here at sic' an hour o' nicht. Your fayther's in, of course he's in, but he's nae sitting up. He's been in bed this hour and mair."

"Well, I suppose I can see him," I said, "and my friend can step into the parlour."

I walked in, taking up the candle as I did so, and old Janet hobbled after me.

"You won't have a very lofty idea of Scotch hospitality," I said, as we entered the dark and fireless parlour. How indescribably dismal and desolate it looked. The old worn horse-hair chairs set in stiff array against the faded paper of the walls, the dingy table-cover on the square table, the bookcase in the recess by the fire-place. All were unchanged, save by the two years' passage of time which lay between me and my last look at them.

"Fetch another candle, Janet," I said, and the old woman, muttering and grumbling, hobbled away to obey me.

Huel glanced around. He made no remark, nor did I. Perhaps he was tracing back in his mind the influences and surroundings of my youth, and wondering whether to pity or praise them for the character they had served to mould.

As for myself, there was a curious mingling of repulsion and indifference in my heart as I looked at those miserly records of the past.

How unhappy I had been here once. How passionately I had rebelled—suffered—struggled against the tyranny that bound me so helplessly. Well, it was something to know I had shaken it off at last—that I could face my father in my new-born independence of *manhood* and tell him I had for ever escaped that

thralldom of unhappy youth, and desired or asked nothing of any man in future.

At this moment Janet returned with another candle and the information that my father was awake, and would see me if I would step up into his bedroom.

With a hasty apology to Huel, who was examining the volumes in the book-case, I went upstairs.

The old man was sitting up in bed, his grey hairs covered with an old woollen night-cap, his lean yellow hands clasping and unclasping themselves nervously as was his wont when agitated.

We shook hands in our usual unemotional manner.

"I did not expect you to-night," he said, looking at me keenly from under his bushy grey eyebrows. "You've no come to stay, I hope, there's nae room ready for ye, and Janet, she's no fit to set to work at this hour and prepare food."

"Pray don't trouble," I answered. "I'm staying at an hotel in Inverness with a friend. I hadn't the least intention of burdening you with my presence."

He drew a breath of relief. "Ah, well, you've grown mair considerate than ye used to be. And so you've been nigh shipwrecked and have met with manifold disasters and troubles, and yet managed to make a fortune ye told me. Verily the ways of Providence are mysterious."

I laughed somewhat harshly. "I never knew Providence concern itself about one's money matters," I said, "but it is quite true that I have had a somewhat adventurous life and have managed to make, if not a fortune, at least sufficient money to render me independent for the rest of my days. Not that I should ever care to be idle again."

"That's a good lad, that's a good lad," said the old man eagerly. "Gold begets gold. Use it well, don't be hurrying to spend it on foolishness and extravagance. Money is a good thing and hard to get. I never thought you would be a rich man, Douglas, you were aye careless and improvident."

"You wanted to put an old head on young shoulders, sir," I said. "That's not possible. But let us not talk of myself any longer. How are you, and how are folks here? . . . It seems as if I had been away long enough for many changes."

"I'm no hand at 'havers,' " he said abruptly. "I leave that for old women and young fools who think the world's only made for them to clatter about it. Janet's weel and thriving you see, and as for myself, I'm no' so helpless but that I can walk to the town and back when I'm needing to do it "

"I am glad to hear it," I said, feeling a strange sense of compassion for the infirmity that vaunted its foolish economies, and the strange clinging to its idol of self even in the face of the approaching shadow which threatens all humanity. I talked to him for a short time longer, but we had never had much in common, and conversation was somewhat strained and difficult.

At last, on the plea of not liking to leave my friend longer alone and the long walk back to the town, I bade the old man good-night.

Just as I reached the door some lingering memory, some desire against which I had been battling uselessly all this night, prompted me to turn back and put one last question.

"By the way," I said, "what of the Camerons and the old lady at Craig Bank? Are they all well? I used to see a great deal of them you know when I was last here."

"I believe they're well enough," he said indifferently. "I'm not one to fash myself about my neighbours. I did hear Janet saying something about the old lady at Craig Bank. She was very ill this last winter, yet she's no more than my age, but women never wear so well as men folk. Her grandchild came to nurse her; the little lass that made the match wi' Campbell o' Corriemoor. That was a fine thing for her, and a proud day for the Camerons and Lindsays I'm thinking. But I think the man must hae been daft myself to take up wi' a bit thing like yon. She'd neither sense, nor looks, nor tocher! Well, well, it's ill trying to teach other folks wisdom."

"But is Mrs. Lindsay better?" I asked eagerly.

"Better—well Janet says that'll never be this side o' the kirk-yard. I'm not sure but what the lassie is with her again. She came to the service a week back I know, for I saw her myself."

I said no more, but my heart seemed to grow lighter of a long suffered weight. A strange comfort seemed to

reach me through those careless words which for the speaker meant so little, for me so much.

Oh Athole! only once again to see you, to touch your hand, to hear your low sweet voice, and then——

Well, then, it seemed to me life might do its worst!

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

ATHOLE'S JOURNAL.

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

"THE greater part of life is made up of failures and mistakes."

I was reading that in a book the other day. The sentence has haunted me ever since. Is it true? If so how sad it sounds!

I am not of the opinion of the country-woman who said a certain aphorism must be true because she had seen it "in print," but I cannot help fancying that there must be some hidden meaning, some sad or bitter experience of the writer's own life, underlying an expression that haunts one as one lays down the volume that contains it.

And all day, as I have looked across the wide moorland, or watched the sunlight on the glancing waters of the loch, and the clouds that change from grey to purple and gold, those words have been ringing in my ears and sounding like a knell of doom in my heart.

For fully and frankly, and without disguise, I confess to myself that their truth has struck home, that my life is one of those made up of failures and mistakes. Or is it not rather one great failure, a record of that irrevocable mistake that again and again women have suffered for—a loveless and unsuitable marriage?

If my unhappiness is of the passive order, yet none the less it is unhappiness. The sense of being in the wrong place, of utter want of sympathy with my surroundings, of absolute incapacity to interest myself in the domestic

details that my mother-in-law finds so all-engrossing, or the farm news, and shooting and fishing triumphs of the Laird.

I have been married nearly two years and I am deadly sick of Corriemoor and its way of life. I know the plan of every day, I might almost say of every hour.

The few people who call on us, or with whom we exchange visits, are all it seems to me cut out on one pattern of conventionality. The men talk of their tenants or the prospects of the moors, with an occasional dash of politics or a religious controversy arising from some disputed text or point of doctrine, and drink copiously of whisky, the very sight and smell of which I loathe. The women discuss their household affairs, their neighbours and their doings, and patiently wait till their lords and masters have finished their libations, and are prepared to escort them to their respective abodes.

There are no young people with whom I can associate, nor does it seem to occur to Mrs. Campbell that I am quite out of my element with these dowagers and matrons. They look upon me as a somewhat flighty and graceless person, and are fond of delivering lectures and counsels to which I listen with amusement or irritation according to my mood.

Only once have I been permitted to ask Bella to stay with me, and I think even her irrepressible spirits and bright geniality suffered under the general depression that reigned in the household.

As the months drifted by and my little dead child was taken from me and laid in the desolate moorland churchyard, I grew more and more restless and unhappy. In vain I tried to assure myself that things would improve or that I should settle down into "my groove." They grew steadily worse.

My husband was kind, but he was not companionable, and certainly not observant. It never seemed to occur to him that I could possibly be dissatisfied with my life at Corriemoor or find it anything but delightful. His mother had lived there ever since her married life began, and his grandfather's wife before her, and another generation or two no doubt ante-dated their advent. The young generation were expected to follow in the footsteps of those older and wiser members of the family. I

dared not say that the sameness and deadly dullness of the routine were oppressing me to such a degree that at times I was almost urged to outspoken rebellion.

The weather, too, was particularly dreary. It rained incessantly throughout the summer, and the disconsolate grey landscape, the dripping trees, and the lowering sky, did not form an inspiring prospect, much as I had heard about the never failing beauty of Corriemoor.

Perhaps the leaven of my own discontent had entered into everything. But try as I might, I could not make mind, feeling, tastes and inclinations fit into the groove laid down for them.

It needs the harsher discipline of life to teach one patience and forbearance, but I was young, passionate, enthusiastic, and therefore fitted my surroundings about as well as the proverbial "peg" in its square hole.

I knew that there were people who would have been perfectly happy in my position, but I chafed like a restive steed under the perpetual restraint imposed on mind, word, and feeling.

I could not interest myself in my neighbours' concerns, though they were good enough to take an extraordinary interest in mine.

If one has any sense of the picturesque, the romantic, the dramatic, one cannot help trying to fit surroundings and associations accordingly. But my efforts were vain and my figures nothing but "lay-figures" of the very heaviest and prosiest type.

So in gloom and heaviness and depression the months dropped one by one into the lap of the past, and I was only aroused out of my long apathy by a sudden and terrifying summons from Grannie. She was dangerously ill—dying they said—and her one cry was for me.

The Laird took me to Inverness straightway, and left me in the little hushed house that seemed so home-like and so dear.

Grannie was very ill, the doctor almost despaired of her, but she took "a turn" as they said very soon after my arrival, and in three weeks' time was convalescent. I stayed on. I was in no hurry to return to Corriemoor and its gloom and loneliness.

At Craig Bank I felt at home. Some one or other of the Camerons were perpetually dropping in. Bella and I

shared the duties of nursing between us. There was sunshine and air, exercise and pleasant companionship for me, and, as a flower expands and rejoices in a congenial atmosphere, so I grew brighter, happier, more content, and the change soon made itself apparent in my looks and manners and habits, as Bella speedily remarked.

"Such a queer bit creature," she said, in her merry, teasing way, "lifting its head like a flower after rain because it's petted and spoiled and fussed over! But what had they done to you, Athole?" she added more gravely, "you looked just broken down when you came here. Aren't you happy, dearie?"

The old fond word, the old fond tones—almost they broke me down. I shook my head. "I'm as happy as I can expect to be," I said, "if there is a meaning to the word, which I sometimes doubt. But my life is very dull and depressing, Bella. That is the honest truth."

"Well, they are rather old fogies for you, my pet. I wish I were a bit nearer and could run over and have a chat with you every day."

"So do I," I echoed wearily, "my mother-in-law and the Laird are not the liveliest company in the world."

"But you have your books—your music?" she said.

"They hate to see me reading, and they only like me to play Scotch music," I answered gloomily. "Mrs. Campbell thinks I ought to be always at needle work, and you know I detest it!"

"Yes, I know, she said with a humorous twinkle in her bright eyes. "I mind well the lazy wee lassie who would not put stitch or seam to gown for any coaxing; but as you're a rich fine lady now surely you have a maid to do your sewing."

"Oh, yes, but still Mrs. Campbell thinks I ought to do a good deal myself."

"But surely you are mistress, Athole, and can do what you like? You mustn't let the old lady rule you in everything."

"I'm afraid she's rather what you call a 'managing' person, Bella," I said ruefully. "I began by giving in to her and begging her to keep the position of mistress and she means to do so I can see."

Bella shook her head deprecatingly. "I told you that was a bad plan."

"But what could I do?" I urged. "I was too young and too ignorant to take my place as the head of the household. Besides, it would have been worse to have had her watching and criticising all my blunders. As it is, at least she has occupation, and I am saved the scoldings that I hear lavished on Jean, and Meg, and Janet perpetually."

"I'm afraid you're not quite happy, Athole?" she said gently.

I felt the tears rise to my eyes. "Oh, my dear," I said, "who in this world can expect to be that? There must always be a shadow to sunlight, a cross, a drawback, a want unsupplied. I am as well off as most people, better perhaps than many. I ought not to be discontented. The pebble in my shoe is a very small one."

"But there should be no pebble at all," she said. "Even a small one makes its sore, when the journey is long."

"Perhaps," I said drearily, "my journey may not be very long. Sometimes I pray so."

She turned away somewhat abruptly. For that night we talked no more of Corriemoor, or my life there.

* * * * *

Grannie's health steadily improved and the Laird's letters began to suggest my return. I was in no hurry to notice his hints, I felt a growing disinclination to go back to the prison-house I loathed, after this unexpected spell of liberty. Bella, I fear, somewhat encouraged my insubordination. We were so happy together; we had such innocent jests and jokes, such long delicious walks, such tender half-spoken confidences.

Kenneth came up from Edinburgh for a week. I had not seen him since I married. He was very much altered, grave, reticent, self-important. He had given himself up heart and soul to his studies and profession, and was everywhere spoken of with the Scotch measure of cautious praise as "likely to do well."

We did not get on at all, he and I. I disliked the masterful importance of his newly-acquired manner, and he, to all intents and purposes, had not approved of my marriage and was fond of making disparaging remarks concerning the Laird, and affairs at Corriemoor generally. I was not sorry when he left. I had but *four days more of liberty* and then I must leave Craig

Bank. An imperative summons had reached me and I knew excuses could no longer avail.

One afternoon I had left Grannie asleep, and was hurrying along the High Street on my way to the Camerons.

It was a dull misty day, with lowering sky that threatened rain, and a piercing easterly wind that made me draw my warm cloak closely round me as I walked along.

The street was almost deserted. I saw but two figures in the whole length of the thoroughfare. They were approaching me from the opposite direction.

Suddenly something in the walk, height, bearing of one of them struck me as familiar. My heart gave one quick leap—the blood seemed to rush in a burning torrent to my face—my feet refused to stir.

Were not the seas between us? Had we not said good-bye for ever? Yet surely fancy was playing me no trick now.

Dizzily, stupidly, I tried to collect my wits—to pass on quietly and unconcernedly, with but one glance that seemed rather to defy than to court recognition.

In vain. A start, a husky cry—the cry of an emotion strong and swift as pain and sorrow and memory could make it, and then—my hand was clasped in the warm, strong clasp of old, and once more I stood pale and trembling in the presence of Douglas Hay!

CHAPTER II.

TWO YEARS—AND AFTERWARDS.

"We twain shall not remeasure
The ways that left us twain."

Two years—two years of trial, suffering, weariness—rolled back as a scroll before flame. My heart, that had so long forgotten to feel glad, fluttered like a bird at sound of that voice speaking my name—the blood that had known no change in its even flow, coursed madly and wildly through my veins as once again I met those eyes that had been the only lover's eyes to me.

What mattered that we had parted in anger? What mattered bitterness, pride, distrust, coldness? One unguarded moment had bereft me of all composure, and I stood face to face with just the one being in the world

who had the power to so move and discompose me—truth speaking out in face and eyes, and trembling voice—truth that defied all effort at coldness.

He was equally agitated. The colour faded from his face, his eyes spoke of pain and gladness both, the hand that clasped mine trembled like a weak girl's, the very accents of his voice were unsteady.

With a strong effort I regained my self-control. I saw the keen eyes of the stranger, who was with Douglas, watching us both intently.

I expressed surprise at seeing him back in Scotland. For two years no word of him had reached me—I imagined he was still in Canada.

"But I have never been to Canada at all," he said. "Is it possible you did not hear that I was shipwrecked?"

"I have heard nothing," I answered simply, "I live so far away—and news travels slowly——"

"True—I—I forgot," he said huskily. "Your home is at Corriemoor. Are you staying long in Inverness?"

"Three days more," I said quietly. "Grannie has been very ill and she sent for me to come here. I have been at Craig Bank for the last six weeks. When did you arrive?"

"Only yesterday," he said, and then opportunely remembering his companion he introduced him to me by the name of "Mr. Huel Penryth."

A strange name, I thought, and a strange man too. My first impression of him was not favourable. The face was a powerful one, but stern and cold, with dark inscrutable eyes that read more than they revealed. The wild thick hair, streaked with grey, fell back from a broad and heavily-lined brow. Care and suffering and endurance had left their mark upon this man. So much even my inexperienced eye could tell.

He raised his hat with grave politeness, as I bowed in answer to Douglas's hurried murmur, and as I met his glance it seemed to me that he had read my secret, and was speculating as to its future bearing on my life. I could not have explained why I felt this, but the consciousness was so acute that I could almost have fancied it had flashed from brain to brain, as the electric current flies from one centre of active force to another.

He spoke, and his voice held a charm that could not be gainsaid. Full, rich, and with a melancholy sweet-

ness of intonation—I found myself listening to the sound even more than to the words. And they were not mere conventional words either

They briefly conveyed the history of that shipwreck and the friendship that had been born of mutual hardship, endurance and companionship. It was the history of those two blank years summed up and presented to me with an elaborate simplicity that yet seemed to lack no detail.

Douglas showed signs of impatience. "Where are you bound for?" he asked at last. "We are keeping you standing in the cold all this time."

I mentioned my destination, and they both turned and walked with me.

How strange it seemed—how strange I felt. I was as one in dreamland—haunted by past visions that were floating and centreing themselves in the present. A word, a glance, a smile, and how much was said and recalled.

Timidly I glanced at Douglas's face from time to time.

How altered it was. All the boyishness and youth had fled. It was stern and grave, and had lost much of the bright colouring and animation that had lent it so great a charm. But instinctively I felt that it had gained in experience and character far more than it had lost of youth and gaiety.

We met on very different ground to that on which we had parted, yet I think the memory of that parting was keenly with us both. I had been so hard and unforgiving—he so sad and so remorseful. But all was altered now. We were boy and girl no longer. Life had grown of interest and importance to him, and had surrounded me with duties and responsibilities. Yet it was hard to put the new personality in place of the old. To see only Mrs. Campbell of Corriemoor, in the Athole Lindsay of both our memories.

I noticed he never addressed me by my married name. I felt inclined to ask him when and how he had heard of that event, but somehow I could not frame the words, and I therefore talked, or tried to talk, of more conventional matters connected with mutual friends and mutual interests.

We reached the Camerons' house and I paused at the gate.

"I shall call on them in the course of a day or two," said Douglas. "Not this morning. Do you think," he added hesitatingly, "that Mrs. Lindsay would be well enough to see me if I paid her a visit?"

"She would be very pleased, I am sure," I answered. "She comes downstairs now every afternoon."

Then we shook hands once more, and they turned down the street, while I went into Aunt Cameron's domicile.

The girls were round me in a moment, brimful of eager curiosity. They had seen me and my two companions from the window.

Was that really—surely it could not be Douglas Hay? How old and altered he was—how tall he looked—and who was his friend?—and so on, and so on.

Their merry chatter, their incessant questioning jarred on me at times, but I did my best to satisfy their curiosity, adding that Douglas Hay himself would be round to see them in a day or two.

After a while the younger girls drifted away to their usual duties or occupations. Bella and I were alone.

There was a space of silence, then her bright dark eyes met mine with grave scrutiny.

"How did you feel?" she asked abruptly. "It was rather—unexpected."

"That," I said, with a faint laugh, "was just what I felt. You could not have expressed it better."

"And you don't mind? You can be friends?" she persisted. "I am rather sorry he came here. What brought him?"

"Natural affection, no doubt," I said. "He came to see his father!"

"Of course he had heard of your marriage! Who told him?"

"He mentioned Corriemoor as my place of abode," I said. "But I did not ask who was his informant."

She was silent for a moment. Then she came to me, quite suddenly, and folded her arms about me and drew me to her dear true heart.

"Oh, my dearie," she said, "don't speak in that hard, cold way to me. Have I not known it all—have I not seen you fighting your battle month by month, year by year? And hasn't it wrung my heart again and again to *watch the change in your wee face, that has grown so*

sad and weariful of late? But I'd be no true friend to you, Athole, if I did not speak the plain truth now. There is far more danger in your meeting with Douglas Hay than ever there was before. It is wiser to recognize a temptation than to believe in one's power of resistance when the danger comes. You will promise me not to see him or meet him, won't you, dear? You'll only be laying up fresh unhappiness for yourself if you do. Mind, I speak plainly. It is not as if your marriage had contented you, and he will watch that very keenly and—if he still cares——"

"Oh, Bella—but that is all over long—long ago," I interrupted.

"Love is a hard thing to kill," she said. "There is just one final ending to it, but neither you nor he touched that."

"I think," I said, coldly, "there is nothing to fear now Bella, not on either side. Even if there were—well I am here but three days more—after that I shall probably never see him again."

"I hope so," she said earnestly. "I hope it all the more because I know how useless are warnings, counsels, efforts, in a case like this. I never had a high opinion of Douglas Hay's character, as you know, but that does not prevent my seeing he is very attractive and very fascinating."

"That," I said, "could never touch me again—nothing in that way—I want something deep, real, strong. Something to lean on and depend on—I suppose," I added with a little bitterness, "it sounds very shocking to say such a thing, but I should like to have liberty to experiment on different people and see how they affect me, or I them. It seems as if life hampered us so dreadfully we can't really *know* each other. We can't say what our real feelings or natures are unless they are tested. I seem to know people so little, and yet I always want to get below the surface, to touch something that will respond and answer to my own appeal, my own needs. But I never can—I never can."

She was silent. Presently she said, "That is an odd fancy on your part, Athole, I don't wonder you are unhappy. You ask too much of life, and feel too deeply."

"Perhaps that is so," I answered. "I am not happy,

I am not contented, and I am not good. Yet I might be all, and I long to be very often. I wonder where the secret of my failure lies? In myself, of course, but how can I comprehend or reach it? One's inner nature is always more or less of a mystery. When I think of what I am and what I want—the intense longings for a fuller and deeper life—the perpetual rebellion against my groove, I feel tempted to do something desperate. I only act and re-act upon myself. No wonder I feel storm-beaten.”

“It seems strange to look at you and then hear you talk like this,” said Bella thoughtfully. “If your life was more active you would be less morbid.”

“My life is destined to be always as it is now, I fear,” I answered, drawing away from her arms at last. “It is my only comfort to have you to talk to, Bella. I think no one else understands me—or—cares very much.”

“Your husband cares for you, dearie. He is grave and serious, and perhaps he seems cold, but he is so good.”

“Oh, I know that,” I answered. “It is my own ceaseless reproach. Sometimes I think I must be very ungrateful, very wicked, but I can't help it. I can't alter myself as I said before. If I could——”

“Well?” she said, looking at me gravely with a little troubled pucker of her white smooth brow.

“Oh,” I said laughing. “I would turn myself into Meg or Jean, of course, with no thought beyond the ‘kye at the byrne’ and the stocking-knitting for the household. How I envy the dull common-place content of such lives!”

“I'm sure you don't—not really,” said Bella with energy. “But my opinion is you want rousing—change. Why can't you get the Laird to take you away? He went abroad once and he told me he enjoyed it very much, why shouldn't he go again?”

I laughed as I remembered some passages of that foreign tour, and the passive composure and grim endurance which Donald had displayed.

“If he told you so,” I answered, “be very sure he did not mean it. He hates foreign travel and foreign ways; even foreign scenery could only bring a reluctant admission from his lips that it was ‘no that bad.’ I believe he thinks Nature quite incapable of favouring

any land but Scotland. Oh, dear," I added with a sigh, "how hard it is to be fettered and hampered like this—to be a prisoner with one's chains always weighing one down. Now if only you and I could go off together, Bella, that would be some fun, wouldn't it? And though there's no reason why we shouldn't, yet picture to yourself the outcry that would arise at the bare suggestion. How all our Scotch Mrs. Grundys would hold up their hands in righteous horror at the 'impropriety.' Oh! how I envy American girls. They do get some enjoyment out of life and youth. And I'm sure they're not a bit the worse for it."

"I never met one," said Bella with a gravity that set me off laughing. "But they're rather bold and forward, are they not?"

"I never found them so, and I've come across plenty in my travels," I said. "Very free and independent, if you like, and as a rule far better educated than English girls. At least they talk better and seem to be at home on most subjects. They are far more brilliant and amusing than girls of any other nation."

"But not nearly so refined and well-bred," argued Bella.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"That means not so dull or depressed, or conventional! Of course their manners and habits are very different to ours, but I always found them interesting."

"Well," said Bella, laughing, "I almost wish we could turn ourselves into American girls for the time being, and go off on a foreign tour, as you suggest. I've always been crazy to go abroad, but I might as well ask for the moon as for permission to do it, or opportunity even if I had the permission."

"Well, I must go back now," I said with a sigh. "Come round this evening, Bella, if you've nothing to do. It's so dull when Grannie goes to bed."

"Certainly, I'll come," she said briskly. "Must you really go back to Corriemoor on Saturday?"

"No help for it," I answered. "But I really do not see why I shouldn't take you back with me, dear."

"Mrs. Campbell doesn't like me," she said laughing.

"I'm not staid enough, or grave enough, I fancy."

"Never mind Mrs. Campbell," I said. "Surely I may be permitted a little independence. The Laird is

coming here for me, I'll tell him you'll return and stay a few weeks with us. May I?"

"Now, Athole, you know well I'm always happy to be with you, but——"

"No buts—no buts!" I cried putting my hands to my ears. "I'll settle all the 'pros and cons' and you pack your box. You needn't be particular; anything does for Corriemoor!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CIRCLE OF FIDELITY.

"I had died for this last year to know
 You loved me. Who shall turn on Fate?
 I care not if love come or go,
 Now—though your love seek mine for mate,
 It is too late."

"ANYTHING does for Corriemoor!"

Had it come to that already? I began to think so. No one seemed to take any interest in what one wore—or how one looked. Sometimes I put on one of my pretty *trousseau* gowns, but I might as well have worn sackcloth for any notice that it aroused. The Laird had but two ideas of colour—black and white. When one was young, one ought to wear the latter—when middle-aged or old, the former. Mrs. Campbell was of opinion that married women should never wear bright colours—and therefore I concluded her silence on the subject of my gowns argued disapproval.

I seldom troubled now about them—dark serge or homespun suited best the uncertain climate and the rough moorland roads. When the weather allowed of it, I rode for hours together, as often as not by myself, though that proceeding was the subject of grave disapprobation also. It was the only pleasure I had, and the Laird had given me a beautiful little thorough-bred mare, with whom I was perfectly at home, and who would carry me like a bird over the rough wild country—making light of gates and fences that came in our way.

I had determined that Bella should come back with me when I left Inverness. I felt that for once in my life I must assert myself—that I could not go back and plunge into the dreariness and dulness of Corriemoor without some temporary relief.

My stay with Grannie was nearly over. The afternoon after I had met Douglay Hay, I was sitting by her side in the little drawing-room, idling with some fanciful embroidery that never seemed to make much progress in my hands. I had mentioned my meeting with Douglas, and his intention to call. I wondered whether he would do so—and if he would bring that strange-looking friend of his with him.

Grannie reclined in her easy chair—a bright fire burned in the grate—for the Spring days were still cold for an invalid. Her worn, patient face looked very sweet with its close lace cap, and bands of silver hair. Her folded hands lay on her lap, looking very white and thin, in contrast with her plain black gown.

I watched her for some time in silence. I was wondering how long it would be before I, too, could win the patience and resignation that made life so calm and restful for her.

“Grannie!” I said at last, seating myself on the stool at her feet, and leaning my head against her knee, “have you had very much trouble in your life?”

“Why do you ask that, my bairn?” she said, meeting my upturned eyes with kindly wonder.

“I don’t know why, exactly—only your face looks as if it had known a great deal of care and sorrow—and yet you are so patient. I’ve never heard you complain.”

“The Lord has been very good to me,” she said gently. “I’ll not deny that sometimes the stripes of affliction were heavy, and hard to bear—but strength is ye given to those who seek it aright—and I learnt to be patient and content at last. The worst trial was my gudeman’s death. I always call him *that*, my bairn. No name ever suited him so well. He was a gudeman to me—and I often think I must have been a sore trial and burden to him—for I was a young feckless thing when I married. I scarcely knew the worth or meaning of a true and patient love. Then we had many trials; loss of children—health—money. But never from his lips came a word of complaint—or a murmur of discontent. After he died I only knew the true meaning of the word ‘loneness.’ Ah! that was a bitter and weariful time! To wake in the grey dawns and know no cheering voice *would greet me*—no kind hand give its strong

and safe support again. Ah! Athole, my bairn, God spare you ever such a trial. When two have been one, and when there comes the darkness and silence that never power on earth may rend asunder—that is the thing that breaks one down, and teaches how helpless and how weak we are!”

I was silent. I thought I, too, had known something of that pain and darkness and silence. Its cloud had never really lifted from off my life. Passive endurance had followed passionate pain—coldness had grown up where once fervid, palpitating, tremulous love had filled heart and soul to overflowing.

This dreaded thing, that she called “loneness,” did I not know it too? And, surely, my pain might equal hers; seeing that, at least, her love had died no death of unworthiness—that always it would be with her in the tender grace and ceaseless reverence of the memory that shined it as its holiest treasure.

“Tell me more,” I said huskily, as I bent my head on her lap. “I want to know how to bear life when it gets hard and difficult—when everything seems at war within our souls.”

“But my little lassie has no need to ask that, yet,” she said tenderly, as she laid her frail hand on my bowed head. “Trial and trouble have not touched you very nearly, Athole. Only the fretfulness and impatience of youth against its own mistakes—or rebellion against a life that is not just what one would have it. Youth is ever so, my bairn; but every year will teach you patience and forbearance—and bring new duties in its train.

I shivered as I rested there in the warm fire-light. It is so easy for the old to preach—so hard for the young to believe. The years might come and go as they pleased. They could never again bring the gladness to my heart that is like sunshine to the day. But if there would only come to me peace and quiet. If I could cease to rebel—cease to desire—cease to *think*.

It was thought that distracted and troubled me. The perpetual conflict—the unending questioning—the consciousness of desires unattainable and persistent—the ceaseless why—why—why? that made of life, love, duty, religion, a torture of doubts that nothing set at rest.

Blessed are those who can accept without question

—to whom faith is as easy as life—when the one serves the purpose of the other, and is accepted as its best gift.

I was not like those contented and unseeking natures. I knew it— I had always known it; and for me life could not but hold tragedy, and sorrow, and remorse. Even as I leant there against Grannie's knees in the old childish way—even as I listened to the sweet patience of her voice and the wise gentleness of her words—I knew in my heart that she would be terrified and horror-struck could she read my mind, could she know the wild turbulence of feeling, the scarce restrained impatience, the ceaseless racking torture of doubt and desire, that there held unholy revel.

Yet I was not willingly thus. I would have been glad enough to believe as she believed—to accept as she accepted—to emulate the patience and steadfastness of her nature. Only by what force, moral or mental, was I to accomplish such a task? To me it only seemed that life held—

“ Really, neither joy—nor love—nor light—
Nor certitude—nor peace—nor help from pain.”

I did not desire its continuance—but I did wish to know more of its meaning. Why it was forced—unasked and undesired—upon Humanity? Why to rebel against its demands and its sufferings was accounted a sin? Why we were all flung and tossed about on its shifting currents like a pack of badly shuffled cards? Why, ever and always, throughout the length and breadth of the globe we call Earth there rang one ceaseless cry of pain that never seemed to win response or pity?—and that, with its vain appeal, mocked every faith and form to which men clung.

But had I spoken thus where would I have met with comprehension in the narrow circle to which I was restricted? Pity and wonder I might find in abundance, tears and prayers for a better frame of mind, or that I might be brought to see things in the “true light.” The light that to me seemed no more true than the hopes based upon it. I could only endure passively to the end. I would not vex this kind and simple soul by the confession of doubts and misgivings such as these.

The sands were running low in Time's hour glass.

Not by word or deed of mine should their passage be troubled or perplexed. I loved her too dearly for that. If she believed I was happy, that the comforts and luxuries of my new home were all I desired in the new life I had accepted, I would not disturb that belief.

* * * * *

A loud knock at the front door startled me from the dreamy sadness of that long silence.

Grannie had fallen asleep. The afternoon was waning, the room was half in shadow save when the flames sent flickering gleams and flashes from time to time.

I rose to my feet as the door opened. It was not hard to guess the visitor, not so hard as to meet the quick flash of those dark blue eyes with the cold greeting of conventionality.

"Grannie is asleep," I said. "But I daresay she will soon wake. Will you sit near the fire. Why have you not brought Mr. Penryth?"

"I was afraid Mrs. Lindsay might not care to see strangers in her state of health," he said.

The cold, measured tones of the familiar voice fell strangely on my ear.

To think that we should be here again, in this same room, at this same hour of dusk and firelight, and yet—what worlds apart we seemed! He seated himself by the window, and I went back to my old chair.

"She is still very weak," I said, nodding in the direction of the quiet figure. "This illness has tried her very severely."

"I am sorry to hear it. She was very kind to me," he added irrelevantly. "But I always think I was not a favourite of hers. I wonder if she could believe in my reformation."

"Have you reformed?" I asked quickly. "In what way?"

"In all ways, if reformation means to do nothing one used to do, and care for nothing one used to care for, to have grown old in feelings, and cold in affections. I feel like a stranger here. I felt like a stranger in my father's house, and yet, it is but two years since I left the place."

"Two years can be very long—under some circumstances," I said.

"You have not found them so, I suppose," he answered,

looking at me with sudden and embarrassing scrutiny. "Your life has been fortunate and happy. I wonder whether mine will ever be more than an aimless dream?"

"It ought to be," I said, my voice hard and cold with stern restraint. "You have been successful. What does a man need more? With wealth and youth and strength of will you can scarcely call life aimless."

"Are *you* happy, Athole?" he asked with startling abruptness and leaning suddenly forward.

The light of the leaping flames shone upon my face, and found me unprepared for their candid revelation

"I—why do you ask?" I said, drawing back into the gloom once more. "Is there any reason why I should not be so?"

"Only one," he said sternly, "if there were any truth or constancy in women."

"Perhaps," I said, "you will mention that reason. I will tell you if it applies to my case."

"It is not one that need trouble you," he said with a fierce bitterness in the low tones of his changed voice. "Only that you have spoilt all my life for me. Only that you have taught me the true meaning of the word despair. Only that your harsh judgment, however deserved, has poisoned every hour of my life since last I saw you. But that cannot matter now. I am a fool to confess it. But oh, Athole, Athole, if you were free and those two years could roll back! . . . I know now what love means to a nature like yours, and I—I could love you worthily at last. But it is all too late—too late! Why were you so hard on me? Why did you send me from you. My error was only the error of youth, a folly of the senses, never of the heart. Can women never believe the wide difference that lies between these two cases?"

"Hush," I said entreatingly. "You have no right to say such words. The past is all over and done with. We made a great mistake, you and I. Perhaps I was too exacting, and you too light. I don't know. Sometimes I have thought so. But there is no use to speak of it now."

"I suppose not," he said. "And yet it is strange, is it not, Athole, that when I have been face to face with death I always saw you—felt you—recognized you as *the one want of my life*? I grew certain enough of

my feelings when it was too late for the certainty to be of any use !”

“What use to tell me of such things ?” I said coldly. “We both made a mistake once. You in promising—I in believing too much. It can do no good to refer to it. All the sorrow and remorse in the world won’t give back one of those days and hours.”

“Would you have one back if you could ?” he said, his voice low and eager, his eyes looking back to mine with the old remembered look.

A sense of passionate indignation rose in my heart. How dared he speak to me thus, look at me thus ? In the days when I loved and believed in him he had almost broken my heart. That first love had been to me as a religion, so pure it was, so deep in faith. It had been turned to shame, doubt, despair. And to speak of it now—*now*.

I glanced at the hand lying idly on my lap. By some chance I had forgotten to put on any of the rings I usually wore. The firelight gleamed on one alone—the plain gold band that symbolized my marriage.

“You don’t answer,” he said presently.

I looked at him coldly and defiantly, then lifted my hand. “My answer is—there !” I said, touching the ring.

CHAPTER IV.

MARRIAGE—OR MARTYRDOM ?

“True love’s the gift which God has given
To man alone beneath the heaven.”

“It is the sweet sympathy
The silver link—the silken tie
Which heart to heart and mind to mind
In body and in soul can find.”

THERE was a moment of silence after my last words.

I rose and went over to the fireplace, and broke the coals gently into a fuller blaze. The noise woke Grannie, as I had hoped it would. She sat up, and asked me the time.

At sound of her voice, Douglas rose and came forward *into the light of the fire*.

“*I have come to see you, Mrs. Lindsay,*” he said,

holding out his hand. "I was so sorry to hear of your long illness from—Mrs Campbell."

Involuntarily I started. It was the first time he had called me that, and the name had a strange and unfamiliar sound spoken by his lips.

Grannie seemed delighted to see him, and poured forth endless questions as to his doings and adventures during the last two years. I sat there listening silently.

Presently Bella bustled in, all gaiety and chatter, and the lamp was lighted, and tea brought, and conversation became general.

It seemed to me that Douglas was very much improved. He was less gay and frivolous, he talked well, almost brilliantly, and listened to Grannie with a deference and sympathy such as he had never been wont to display.

I could not help thinking how much older he looked, but the change was an improvement, seeing that the face had gained in character what it had lost in youth.

"I am going back to Australia," he said, in answer to some question of Grannie's, "I like it, and I like the free and unconventional life."

"You'll be taking to yourself a Colonial bride," said Bella laughing. "I hear the Australian girls are very beautiful and very charming."

"That may be," he said curtly. "I don't know any. The only people with whom I was on anything like terms of intimacy were some Scotch folk with whom Huel and I stayed, and who came home with us. But the daughters, though very pretty, clever girls, were scarcely types of the genuine Australian. They were always very anxious to see their father's native land, and so he brought them over. We parted in Liverpool, but I should never be surprised to see them up North any day. They meant to make a tour of Scotland."

I found myself wondering and speculating about those girls. Were they pretty—did he like them? Perhaps some day he would marry one of them and live in that new world which he seemed to appreciate so much. Well, it *could* not matter to me now what he did, or where he went.

Yet a sense of irritation was strong within me, as I sat silently there listening to him. Why had he not *always been as he was now*. If, as he had said, he was

capable of loving more worthily, he was also more worthy of being loved. The folly and lightness and frivolity of youth had changed into the deeper gravity and earnestness of manhood. No years of education could have given him what those two years of hardship, endurance, work and privation had given. Had we met *now*, or had I been less hasty in fettering myself with those chains of duty that felt so heavy and so burdensome, life might have been a very different thing to both of us.

At last he took his leave. Both eyes and hand clasp were cold for me. I told myself it was well they should be—well that between us both some barrier of wrath and indifference should arise and live for ever.

I could not understand why this sudden meeting, this involuntary recall of old memories and associations had been able to affect me thus. I had thought myself so strong, so safe, so cold. And he had seemed to have passed so utterly out of my life, to have entered into such a totally different sphere of action. When I thought of his words, of the look in his eyes, as the dancing fire-flames had leapt into their depths, I felt a strange and most unholy gladness. "He suffers now," I told myself, "he knows at last what it is to lose love and hope, and see life turn blank and grey as the years gather round it. All he has given me to bear is recoiling on himself. It is just, and I am glad of it."

Yet presently, when darkness and solitude were with me, and I laid down my aching head and vainly sought to find rest or sleep, I wondered why fate had played so cruel a trick on me. It would have been so much better to have felt that silence and distance lay between our parted lives for evermore.

How the old sense of weariness and despair came over me that night. What a useless being I seemed. I had no aim or object in life. What could I do at Corriemoor that had not been done much better by others? It was not possible to take much interest in snuffy old men and women who talked a scarcely intelligible language, and desired nothing better than their annual gifts of tobacco and whiskey from the Laird.

There was no absolute poverty or distress on the whole *estate*; they were too hardy for sickness, too satisfied *with their own spiritual and moral welfare for discontent.*

If I visited them, they were friendly and not one whit conscious of any favour. They accepted everything as a right, and would advise or suggest actions in a calm and perfectly affable manner that had been used to astonish me. When they prayed they asked a special blessing on Corriemoor and all belonging to it, and confidently believed that the blessing would be given.

No doubt Providence had plenty to do, but that should not prevent His especial favour or interest being manifested in this spot or among these people. Their self-confidence amazed me, their independence and pride seemed disheartening. They wanted nothing, they never betrayed any excitement or emotion. They were always good-tempered, hardworking, clean, well-fed, but they absolutely ignored any social inferiority, and were as dignified and complacent as the folk at the great house could have been.

I was rather patronized and looked down upon—"the young wife, up at Corriemoor"—they called me, and the old women would lecture me on the imprudence of taking long rides in all weathers, or suggest a more intimate concern in dairy work, or household matters as befitting one connected with that illustrious place.

I lay awake now, and thought with shuddering dislike of going back to it all. Of the Laird's placid good-humour, of Mrs. Campbell's perpetual lectures and suggestions, of the dull, formal dinner parties, the visits to be paid and received, the books that had to be read and re-read, the dreary Sundays with the long service at the Kirk and the inevitable discussions and arguments on points of "doctrine" afterwards.

I knew it all so well, I had never so loathed and hated it as I did now. And there was no help, no hope of alteration. From month to month, from year to year, my life was mapped out for me. I could not get away from it. I could only endure.

Well—if numbness was not rest, it was better than the rack of pain. I might grow passively content in time.

In time!—and yet I had only one hope to breathe, one prayer to pray "God—in mercy keep him from me!"

* * * * *

The next day the Laird came to Inverness. He did *not stay at Craig Bank*, for there was no accommodation

for him in that small domicile, but he put up at the Hotel, the same hotel where Douglas and his friend were staying.

He came over to see us, brimfull of his meeting with them both, and delighted with Huel Penryth, whom he declared to be a man of highly superior intelligence as well as a fine sportsman.

"If only I could offer him some shooting," he said regretfully.

"Would you have asked them to Corriemoor if it had been August or September?" I said wonderingly.

"Certainly I would," he answered with a heartiness that showed his hospitable intentions were genuine.

"It wants only three months to August. But they are not going to stay here," I said.

"Perhaps they will come back," said the Laird, cheerfully. "Penryth talks of going to Cornwall, that is his native place, and Hay will accompany him. It seems very odd," he went on, "that in Australia they should have knocked up against an old friend and school fellow of mine, Robert McKaye. He's a rich man now, and has a cattle station on the Emu river. We have corresponded occasionally. Now he's come over to the old country for a while and brought his two daughters with him. I must get to see them all, and ask them to Corriemoor. Robert McKaye and I were main good friends in our college days, but he was poor, and not ower well content at home, and had a very adventurous nature. I'm very glad he's been such a successful man. Penryth speaks very warmly of him, and his kindness and hospitality, and he's very rich——"

"That" I said somewhat bitterly, "is to sum up all his virtues in a word. Is he coming to Inverness, did you hear?"

"They could not just be sure of that. But he'll be in Glasgow. If I only knew for certain when, I'd make a point of going down to see him. He's making a year of it, so Penryth says."

"Surely Mr. Penryth could ascertain his address," I said, rather amused at the unwonted excitement displayed about these people. "Why don't you ask him?"

He surveyed me somewhat doubtfully.

"I was thinking," he said, "would you be wearying

if I left you here a wee bit longer? Then I could run down to Glasgow and ascertain if McKaye has arrived there yet. I know his folk; he's sure to be seeing them, and then, maybe, I could arrange for him to visit us at Corriemoor."

"I should be delighted," I said eagerly.

Anything in the shape of novelty was delightful to me. The introduction of new faces and friends at Corriemoor promised, at least, some change in the dull routine of its life.

"Then I'll do that," said the Laird, with almost startling abruptness. "I'll leave for Glasgow to-morrow, and it'll be strange if I don't hit upon Robert McKaye before a day has passed."

"And I will remain here," I said, "until you return."

"Unless you would like to come there with me," he said. "You've never seen Glasgow."

"No, and have no wish to," I answered somewhat hurriedly. "I mean," I added, in apology for my candour, "that I've always heard it was so dirty and gloomy, and ugly."

"It's not a very beautiful place," he said. "Even we Scotch folk cannot but allow that. You see the coal and iron factories spoil it, and the climate is aye dull and damp. But there's money to be made there, and the wealthy folk can afford to live out of the town and its grime and ugliness. Kelvin Grove is very pretty, and one or two of the parks. You're sure you would not care to go with me?"

I shook my head.

"Grannie is not at all strong yet," I said, "and she is very reluctant to lose me. I will stay with her till you return, and," I added with the courage born of determination, "I have asked Bella Cameron to come back with me to Corriemoor for a while. It is so long since she stayed there."

His face clouded. "My mother does not like her," he said

"I am sorry for that," I answered coldly, "but you can't expect me to order all my affections and tastes to please your mother. As it is I am a mere cipher in the house and am never consulted or considered in any way."

His ruddy face paled. He looked at me with a dawning fear in his calm, grey eyes.

"Why, Athole—why, my dear," he said wonderingly—"You're no' meaning to say that you're not satisfied? I thought you and my mother agreed so well."

"So we do," I answered, rather ashamed of my momentary irritation. "You can't disagree with a person to whom you are bound to submit your judgment and inclination even in the smallest matter, and that is what I have to do at Corriemoor."

"I thought you were quite content," he muttered, looking at me as if I had presented myself before him under a totally new aspect.

I laughed somewhat bitterly. "Oh, I do not wish to change things, they are best as they are. But I think I am at liberty to ask my cousin—or—or anyone else—to stay with me if I wish, without your mother's permission."

"Of course, of course," he said hurriedly, "I'll make that all right with her. And indeed," he added, as if struck by a brilliant idea, "there's no reason why we shouldn't have some folk to stay at Corriemoor and rouse up a bit. I'll have the McKayes, and perhaps Mr. Penryth and young Hay might come to us also. There's room and to spare in the old place, and we'll go up the lochs, you've never been there yet. I can have Lord Monteith's yacht for the asking. He's not using it, he's abroad in Spain this year. I'm pleased I thought of it. No doubt you've been dull and moping at Corriemoor, but we'll cheer up a bit and have some young life there. Aye, that we will."

He rubbed his hands together and his whole face beamed with satisfaction. I was rather taken aback by this new scheme of his. The idea of his inviting Douglas Hay and Huel Penryth to stay at Corriemoor seemed preposterous. "But they will never accept," I told myself. "Surely Douglas would not dream of staying there—under my roof—as my guest."

I felt so sure of this that I did not trouble myself to combat the Laird's scheme. It would fall to the ground of itself.

The next day he left for Glasgow and I remained at Craig Bank.

CHAPTER V.

A DISCUSSION.

"If solid happiness we prize,
Within our breast this jewel lies.
And they are fools who roam;
The world has nothing to bestow,
From our own selves our joys must flow,
And that dear hut—our home."

WHATEVER I might have wished or intended in the matter of avoiding Douglas Hay was now rendered impossible.

He stayed on at Inverness, he called at Grannie's or the Camerons' almost daily. Everywhere he received warm welcome, his old faults and sins were conveniently forgotten now that he was rich and prosperous.

I was almost tired of hearing how much he had improved, even the Cameron girls sang his praises from morning till night. He had brought Huel Penryth to call at Craig Bank and Grannie was delighted with him. He treated her with a grave and gentle courtesy, a chivalrous deference, that was infinitely charming. I think the sweet-natured old Scotch lady was a revelation of character to him. He told me he had never met any woman like her—never known what a sense of "rest" the mere presence of one person could give to another.

And day after day drifted by and still they lingered on, and still the Laird remained in Glasgow. He had unearthed the McKays and was going here, there, and everywhere in their company. He had gained his point and they were all coming to stay at Corriemoor, but first the girls wanted to visit Edinburgh and Aberdeen and then come on to Inverness. Robert McKaye, his friend, was very desirous that the Laird should stay with them all the time, and, if I did not object and was content to remain on at Craig Bank, he felt inclined to do so.

He seemed to think it would be much pleasanter for us all to proceed to Corriemoor together, and I heartily agreed with him.

I read this letter out to Grannie, and found she was only too pleased to keep me with her. Her health had *very much improved*; she was able to go out now on

fine days, and Douglas Hay or his friend would be almost certain to come round to escort her. It gave me a strange pang sometimes to see her leaning on Douglas's stalwart arm, to watch the handsome head bent down to catch her lightest word, to hear the pleasant ringing voice greet her with its hearty welcome, the voice that now was always cold and formal to me.

It was right it should be so. It was right that we should school ourselves to coldness and formality, but the effort was not easy—nor the result always pleasant.

From that hour when he had sat with me in the little fire-lit drawing room, his manner entirely changed. It was composed, calm, polite as a stranger's might have been, nothing more. Now and then if a chance glance met mine, it was instantly withdrawn. We never exchanged a word together save the purest formalities, never were alone for an instant. Never by word, or look, or tone gave that hint of "Do you remember?" which of all love's snares is the hardest to avoid. A great coldness and yet a strange content came over me. I told myself that the sting of the past had been withdrawn, that we had both learnt our lesson and were satisfied with the learning.

Soon enough our ways would part once more, and life become that thing of duty and obligation I had so long known.

How I envied men! If they suffered, at least they had liberty and action to compensate for moments of endurance. Women had to bear — bear — bear with passive patience and inward rebellion. We might flit on broken wing along the road of duty—they could lift strong pinions of will and freedom in support of errant impulse, or determined project.

* * * * *

I saw a great deal of Huel Penryth. Sometimes I wondered whether Douglas had ever confided any portion of that bygone love-story to his friend. It seemed to me often that he was criticising and observing me so keenly.

There was a strange fascination about his conversation—I had never met with a mind so widely cultivated, *so keenly analytical*, so absolutely indifferent to all weakness of human affection, or sympathy.

There are natures here and there, which are capable

of standing alone, of supplying companionship and interest to themselves, and certainly Huel Penryth possessed such a nature.

I could not marvel at the change in Douglas Hay, after two years of companionship and association with this strange being, and that, too, at a time when his own mind and nature were more capable of being influenced by strong will and stern judgment.

It was with no small surprise that I learnt from Huel Penryth that he had accepted the Laird's invitation to Corriemoor, and had induced Douglas to do the same.

"Hay did not wish to go there, but I have a keen desire to see those famous Lochs that Campbell is always boasting of," he said. "I have travelled far and wide in my time, and I always make a point of seeing as much as there is to be seen in any country. Having come to Scotland, it is scarcely likely I should leave half of it unexplored. And this was a rare chance," he added; "I felt quite grateful when your husband proposed it."

"You will find Corriemoor fearfully dull," I said. "I know no place that conveys the idea of 'stagnation' so absolutely. Everyone is the same at the year's end as they were at the beginning. Everything is done as their fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers did it. An independent opinion shocks the people; the slightest variation in habit savours of 'boldness' and unorthodoxy. They nearly drove me wild at first with their narrowness, and exclusiveness, and sublime self-satisfaction, but I am used to it now."

"That statement," he said gently, "is not quite true. You would never get *used* to such a life; it is entirely antagonistic to every feeling and every thought. But you accept it because you cannot help yourself, and in time you will cease to rebel, and will grow calm and even-minded and perhaps content; then you will be happier."

"That word—always that word!" I exclaimed involuntarily. "Has it really any meaning beyond the mere selfishness of personal enjoyment, or the suitability of one's immediate surroundings?"

He flashed a keen and searching glance at me.

"Have you learnt to ask yourself that?" he said. "I would answer you as I have answered myself. Man *seeks to be 'happy'* because so constituted that pain—

physical or mental—is distressing to his organisation. But beyond pure animal enjoyment—that is to say a combination of perfect health, utter indifference to all that ministers not to sense and feeling, the mere delight in mere existence — there is no meaning to the word. Shall I tell you why? Because spiritual or mental happiness cannot proceed from itself; it needs participation and sympathy. Picture nymph or shepherd of Arcadian simplicity before sigh of desire or tender longings had vexed the heart, and disturbed the dreaming serenity of perfect content, and you have the nearest possible approach to earthly happiness. They lived in the golden age of poets—in the fairest phantasms of imagination, in the youth of the young, glad earth. They are our past, to envy or ridicule as our matured and educated senses incline us. But we have lost, even as we have gained. We seek deeper truths, we know a fiercer thirst. The Great Beyond has dazzled sight through a veil of speculation and a mist of wonder, unappeased by mere distortion of what has been accepted in the past. Here and there a mental hand-clasp strengthens, a mutual companionship cheers, the delicate tendrils of sympathy and love are clasped and held by strong and tender support. The momentary ecstasy of such discovery turns all that is highest, purest, tenderest in our being to one song of delight. We have found happiness at last. It is secure, it is perfect; the world is bathed in sunshine, the golden lyre of Nature tuned to our own key of joy. For a little space we grasp our dream, believing it reality. But it is never that, never for one single moment. When it ceases to be a dream, our pleasure in it is gone—awakening and disillusion are one and the same thing.”

“You speak very bitterly,” I said.

“I speak of life as I have found it, and I have been a student of Humanity for more years than I should care to enumerate,” he answered. “I have always discovered that the animal nature of man alone finds pleasure in life—and alone dreads death, for death severs the link in its treasured and close-held chain of enjoyment. The thinking man, the student, the philosopher, the artist, the poet—they, and they alone know the fuller depths of this same life, and find in

them but sorrow and bitterness. The seeking mind has no abiding place on earth; it learns its lessons from Humanity, it sounds depths of despair, and soars to heights of sublimity, and suffers alone and uncomprehended. Sometimes it only reaps forgetfulness, sometimes a sweeter harvest of thankfulness and reverence that comes too late for physical benefit. But again and again, in all ages, from all time, the story is the same. We preach to the deaf, we seek to be eyes to the blind, we spend our days in toil, our nights in feverish thoughts and eager research. We gain—what? little belief and less gratitude. Perhaps the child running through fields of buttercups in the sunshine, its hands filled with Nature's spoils, its heart glad with innocent delight of life and only life—perhaps such a being touches happiness because any wide meaning of the word is unnecessary and unsought. I know of no other mind or nature to whom it has proved aught but a myth and a despair; elusive as the colours of the dawn which a painter vainly tries to seize and fix upon his canvas."

"You make life a very dreary thing," I said. "Does not friendship, or kindred, or love, each and all of these, do something to lighten its darkness and smooth its rough paths?"

"Here and there I grant you one may meet true friendship, or genuine family affection. Love, that golden idyl of youth, that vision of beauty and delight we for ever try to seize—love, as we picture and dream of it—is rarely, if ever, found. In its grosser or simpler forms it may abide, and then, surrounding itself with other interests and affections, proves as satisfactory as most human passions; but love itself, the ethereal, the divine, stealing from some fairyland of Romance, making sunshine in the darkness and gladness in the day, bringing rapture with a touch—a look of mutual comprehension—a thought shared—a word whispered—love like this has but brief abiding place, is more a thing of soul than sense; even as we gain, we lose it."

I listened silently. The truth of those words came home to me very bitterly, and with a new sense of pain, because they seemed to sound like an echo of all I had *dreamt, cherished, lost,*

His voice broke on my ear again. "You have suffered, you have learnt the frailty of human sympathy and the weakness of human faith; you will be the sadder for your lesson, but the wiser because you learnt it in youth. Put dreams aside, yield yourself to the tyranny of every-day life. Bury in its sands the object which has troubled its surface. In time you will learn content. Human passions, desires, sentiments will cease to trouble you. You will ask no longer then to be 'happy.' You will have gained a height of serene content that will prove infinitely more satisfactory than any feeling dependent on another, and seared and branded by the fierce scars of human passions."

I sighed involuntarily.

"Ah! if the attainment of such content were easy, or Time lagged less upon the road!"

"Some day," he answered, "it will seem so cruelly short a journey. In youth we only look at the mile-stones to see how far we have travelled. Later on we remember the wayside flowers and know much we have missed."

"Oh," I said, "if one had interest, ambition, occupation! I envy men."

"Believe me, you need not. We suffer quite as keenly as you—even if more peremptory needs force us to put aside our remembering hours and sad memories to some quiet or dark interval in the hurried march of life. We seize upon distraction and occupation with avidity. You think us heartless. So we misjudge and wrong one another. Nature cannot judge nature, nor soul soul. The surface histories we read may be widely different from the real story beneath. Who can guess the contents of the volume from its binding, or read the grief of man behind his smile? The martyr's life is not a thing of a past century—it is the pulse of unspoken and unguessed sorrow beating always, always, in the breast of Humanity. So shall it beat, so shall its passionate pain throb, unstilled, unknown, unpitied, till Time and Life for us have ceased to be!"

The strange melancholy sadness of his voice touched me almost to tears. Instinctively I guessed he had drawn no exaggerated picture. His was one of those *lives*—enduring silently, suffering secretly—the smart and

sting of hidden pain for ever rankling in the tortured heart.

I wondered what had brought to him this burden of unshared grief. What loss—what faithlessness—what dream long dead and broken?

He looked at me suddenly. Perhaps he saw the tears wet on my lashes, and read the sympathy in my face.

His own softened and grew almost gentle.

He took my hand with a sudden nervous pressure. "You understand me," he said. "I think you are one of the few women who would give sympathy without question. But the day for that is over. I have learnt to stand alone."

CHAPTER VI.

SPECULATIONS.

"Alas ! how little can a moment show
Of an eye where feeling plays,
In ten thousand dewy rays ;
A face o'er which a thousand shadows go,
The bosom-weight, your stubborn gift,
That no philosophy can lift."

"Do you think the world is coming to an end?" ejaculated Bella in wonder, looking up from a letter I had just handed to her. "Why the Laird seems fairly daft about those folks. What a set out at Corriemoor ! The old lady will be thinking her good, steady boy has taken leave of his senses !"

I laughed as I took back the letter, which had come by the morning's post.

"It certainly will be a change, and a very great one," I said.

"Well, I'm glad enough for your sake," said my cousin. "You look quite bright and cheery again ! It's no longer 'Oh, anything will do for Corriemoor.' I'm thinking I'll have to look out my 'braws,' and the Leddy o' Cockpen will e'en have to don her silk gowns and preside at her ain board in style, instead of moping like a wee brown mousie in the wainscot."

"I wonder," I said, still smiling, "what Mrs. Campbell thinks of all this?"

"She'll fancy you and I have turned her laddie's head," laughed Bella, "whereas it's all these McKays. *Are you not curious to see them?*"

"Yes, I think I am, if only for the revolution they seem to have created in the mind of our staid and solemn Laird. It is very pleasant to think of this yacht at our disposal. I have never been on one in my life, and after hearing such endless rhapsodies on the scenery of the Lochs, I am more than curious to see them."

"I don't fancy you'll be disappointed," said Bella, "provided the weather keeps fair. I've heard a great deal about Loch Fyne and Loch Lynne, and the scenery of the Western Highlands, and the sunsets and sunrises over the mountains, and the strange lonely islands where only the wild fowl seem to live. The men will be for shooting of course, and we women-folk must do what we can for amusement. If the McKays are pleasant, I make no doubt we shall enjoy ourselves."

"I think there is little doubt of that," I said.

"You'll mind and not be flirting with Douglas Hay again," said Bella, with sudden seriousness. "Mr. Penryth is safe enough, but it was not the wisest thing in the world for the Laird to ask Douglas."

"He could scarcely have asked his friend without including him in the invitation," I said coldly, "and you need be under no apprehension of my 'flirting' as you call it. You appear to forget I am the only married woman of the party, and have to chaperone three eligible damsels. Besides, I and Douglas Hay are little more than strangers now. You can see for yourself how much he is altered."

"That is true," said my cousin gravely. "But it is an alteration that I fancy you have to answer for; that is why I warn you. If he had quite forgotten, and if life were pleasant to him now, he would not look so cold and grave and avoid you in such a very marked manner. However, one comfort is that you are cured, and not likely to encourage him in any of his old follies."

I glanced quickly at her.

"You are very observant," I said. "Since your mind is at rest respecting Douglas and myself—tell me what you think of Huel Penryth?"

A sudden gravity stole over the bright, winsome face. "If I told you," she said, "you would laugh at me as fanciful."

"Why should I? He is a man about whom one cannot help wondering and speculating. He excites

one's interest from the moment he speaks. Even the Laird did not escape."

"I know that. Well, what I found out about him was partly from a chance word he let fall, and partly from some conversation I had with Douglas Hay. They stayed a night at Edinburgh on their way here. Douglas told me that, and I said, 'Oh, your old friend Mrs. Dunleith is there. She has quite forsaken Inverness.' 'I know,' he said quietly, 'I went to call on her.'"

The old, sharp, jealous pang at my heart, at the mere mention of that name. Bella's eyes met mine—I wondered whether she read any change in my face.

"He did not lose much time," I said coldly.

"No," she said. "But, if you remember, it was Mrs. Dunleith who sent him out to Canada, and furnished him with introductions—which, by-the-way, he never used. Did you never think it strange, Athole, that neither his father nor Mrs. Dunleith ever told us about his being shipwrecked? They both knew the name of his vessel—though we never heard it."

"How could they suppose it would interest, or concern us?"

"Well," she said indignantly, "Douglas Hay was our friend long before Mrs. Dunleith ever saw him!"

"True," I answered indifferently. "But, my dear, your conversation is what the old Irish-woman called 'a thrifle discoorsive.' What has all this to do with Huel Penryth?"

"I am coming to that," she said impressively. "I am sure, Athole, that he knows something about Mrs. Dunleith—something not quite to her credit."

"I should think a great many men might know *that*," I answered coldly.

"No doubt," persisted Bella. "But there is some secret, some mystery in her life, and I'm certain Huel Penryth knows it. I can't tell you why I feel this so strongly—but if by any chance her name ever crops up in conversation, just think of what I've told you and—*watch his face*."

"I will," I said, not without some wonder at her suspicion. I remembered his strange words, his strange indifference to human affections, his cynicism with regard to women, and my own conviction that some

deep and still unhealed wound dealt him in the past, was accountable for all. Strange if Mrs. Dunleith had been the woman who wronged him.

What could there be about her to charm or win two men so totally opposite in mind and character, as Douglas Hay, and Huel Penryth?

She was not very beautiful, nor very brilliant, nor very alluring, yet she had held so strange a power that for sake of it one man declared his life had been wrecked—for sake of it another had been false to all truth, and honour, and chivalry. I sighed heavily.

"I cannot understand," I said, "why bad women seem to have so much more power than good ones. Look at the things men do, and have done, for them since ever the world had a history to chronicle. The women who have had the greatest charm, and subjugated the most hearts, have always been of the 'syren' and seductive type. Helen, Cleopatra, Phryne, Faustine, Semiramis, the Borgia, Mary of Scotland, Catherine of Russia, the Maintenon, the Pompadour, and ever so many more. But none of them were good, or faithful, or pure women. *They* never have histories. They can only love loyally, and suffer silently."

"Perhaps they are happier for that," said Bella. "I often think it must be a great misfortune to be very beautiful. You are always beset by admiration and flattery. You have infinitely more temptation than plainer or merely pretty women. Your own sex are always spiteful and jealous, and men won't be your friends, or can't. On the whole beauty is not so enviable."

"I wonder," I said somewhat irrelevantly, "in what Mrs. Dunleith's power of charming consists?"

"Well, she would not be likely to waste it on us," laughed Bella. "I confess I am curious about her past. I had always a doubt of her being quite what she represented herself. Adventuresses are not always bold and obtrusive and dashing, you know; and the quiet, subtle ones are infinitely more dangerous."

"Douglas was such a boy," I muttered ill-advisedly, my thoughts drifting back to that time when this woman had held the power to make me so terribly unhappy, "*she* might have left him alone."

Bella looked quickly up at me.

"Some women," she said, "seem to have a predilection for boys. Perhaps they are safer or less exacting than those that the Catechism calls 'of riper years.'"

"I wonder if she really was a widow," I persisted.

"Why, my dear child," laughed Bella, "you are positively growing uncharitable! What on earth can it matter to us now, who or what she was?"

"Nothing, of course," I said stupidly, "only it would be some satisfaction to know."

"She is too clever for that," said Bella gravely. "Don't trouble your dear little head about her, coz; she cannot spoil our yachting trip at all events, and that's all we have to think of at present."

"It seems almost too good to be true," I answered, rising at last and gathering up my letters. "Oh, Bella, I wish we were starting to-morrow."

She laughed.

"All in good time, dearie. I think it is pretty certain to come off. And that reminds me I must get a serge dress. You might come out with me now, and we'll go to Miss MacPherson's and choose one. What about yourself?"

"I shall have one also. Navy-blue serge and white braid, I think. Let us have both alike, Bella."

"With all my heart," she agreed.

So we tell Grannie we are bound for the dressmaker's; and then I dress, and we walk sedately down to the High Street, thoughts and tongues still busy with the all-engrossing topic of the yachting trip.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

A RIFT IN THE CLOUDS.

"The sounding cataract—haunted me like a passion,
The tall rock—the mountain
And the deep and gloomy wood;
Their colours and their forms were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love
That had no need of a remoter charm,"

CAN this be Corriemoor?

I rub my eyes and ask myself the question doubtfully sometimes. Corriemoor gay with girls' blithe laughter and merry voices—Corriemoor with every passage and *corridor* echoing with men's steps, and restless move-

ments, and the rustle of dresses and all the stir and movement of young life.

We are all here, and a week has passed—and tomorrow is the day fixed for starting on the yachting trip to the Lochs. I am still filled with wonder at the Laird's geniality—at Mrs. Campbell's hospitable excitement and interest—at the popularity of Douglas Hay—and the unfailing mirth and good-nature of the McKaye girls.

They have struck up a great friendship with Bella, but I am not one bit jealous. Of me they seem a little doubtful—they have confided to Bella that I am so grave and serious, they cannot quite understand me. Surely, as mistress of this beautiful place, I ought to be perfectly happy and content.

I wonder to myself if they know how far happier they are in possession of youth, freedom, and the gaiety and innocent mirth that can only spring from natures perfectly heart-whole, and as little troubled by sentiment as the bird is by a summer's-day cloud.

Dinner is over to-night, and we are all flitting in and out of each other's rooms, intent on last preparations and endeavouring to close refractory boxes, as luggage has been strictly limited. The girls are bubbling over with mirth and excitement. Like myself, they have never been on a yacht, and curiosity is rife as to what sort of life it will be, and what sized vessel is to transport us from place to place.

But at last our preparations are complete. The luggage is despatched in advance, and when we join the yacht we are amazed to find it quite a large vessel of some sixty tons.

The weather is delicious. A blue-grey sky, misty and cloudy—a faint warm breeze from the south-west ruffling the water into mimic waves. We explore the yacht with eagerness and delight. The saloon, the state-rooms, the dainty hangings and decorations, the innumerable inventions for comfort and convenience in a limited space, the exquisite and delicate neatness of every detail—these are matters of wonder and excitement, as well as novelty.

There is a small piano in the saloon—pictures on the walls—flowers everywhere. It is a veritable fairy floating palace. The Laird has taken all the arrangements of the *tour on himself*, and he and the sailing-master are on

very friendly terms. We sit on deck in the quiet afternoon greyness and watch the white sails bringing us up the broad channel between Bute and Arran. The distant coast looks pale and hazy—the bays that open here and there catch strange lights and shadows of a subdued and dreamy kind. Before us the hills of Bute and Inch Marnoch, and the shores of Corval and Cantire are bathed in a soft glow, which lights up the tints of fern and gorse, and the faint promise of bloom from the heather.

We reach Tarbert soon after sunset, and anchor in the pretty little harbour.

There is some discussion as to whether we will go to the hotel or remain on the yacht. The discussion is strongly in favour of the latter course—so we dine in the pretty little saloon, and after dinner assemble on deck and watch the pallor of twilight fade into starry glory, wonderfully clear and beautiful against the dark mountainous background.

Then the moon comes up bright and resplendent, and lights up the broad bosom of the loch and the dusky heights, and the little town and all the craggy wildness of the surrounding scenery, and the picturesque beauty of Inversnaid.

Gradually the merry chatter and laughter of the girls grows subdued—a stillness and soberness falls upon us all, only broken by an occasional murmur of admiration at some change in the throbbing wonder of the heavens, or glow and sparkle of the rippling water where moon and starlight are reflected in broken gleams. Presently, as the dusk deepens and the brooding shadows descend, the sound of music comes floating from below.

I know the touch and the voice only too well. Softly and sadly the “Farewell to Lochaber” falls on the hushed stillness, to be followed by another and yet another of the old, sweet, plaintive airs I had been used to hear so often in the old days.

The old days! How near they seem to-night—how many soft and dangerous murmurings throng to my heart at sound of remembered words, and familiar strains.

A brief pause, and then we hear the prelude to “Auld Robin Gray.”

The tears are wet on my cheek ere the sweet, sad

words have breathed their last echo. Why had he sung that song? Surely he might have remembered——

* * * * *

A voice broke on my ear—the voice of the old Scotchman, Robert McKaye.

“If the laddie could do nothing else,” he said huskily, and with no attempt to conceal his emotion, “he might win tears from a stone wi’ that voice of his. I mind me well in the bush yonder how wonderful it seemed to hear the auld tunes. I could have greeted just like any bairn when he would sit and sing to us in the hot moonlight nights, and my lassies—well, nothing would do but they must come ‘home,’ as they called it, and see and hear for themselves all about Scotland and the Scotch folk, and get to know about *Clans* and the gathering o’ the Highlanders—and the way they lived—and what a ‘Loch’ was like—and the colour o’ heather, which they had never seen—and moors and mountains and deer-forests—and the Lord only knows what all. But I’m bound to say, Mrs. Campbell, that had it no’ been for your generous offer of this yacht they’d never have had the chance of seeing these places as they ought to be seen. I tell them they’re not half grateful enough.”

“Who’s not grateful enough, McKaye?” said the bluff hearty voice of the Laird just behind us. “Here Athole, lassie, I’ve brought you a shawl to wrap yourself. It’s chilly sitting here in the night air.”

He wrapped a warm tartan round my shoulders as he spoke. I was somewhat surprised at so unwonted an attention on his part.

He and Mr. McKaye moved off, each with their favourite pipe aglow. I watched the stalwart figures, and felt glad that the Laird had a companion so much after his own heart. He was far more genial and pleasant now, than I had ever known him.

My meditations were interrupted by Huel Penryth.

“Are you not tired of sitting here so long, Mrs. Campbell,” he asked. “Would you not like a walk over our limited deck space?”

I rose at once. I did feel rather cramped and chilled, *though* I had not noticed it before. We walked to and fro in the quiet starlight. Voices and snatches of song and music from below came to us from time to time.

"They are all there with Douglas," said Penryth presently. "He has a wonderful knack of music ; just set him down and he will go on—on—playing, singing, drifting from melody to melody. That is the sort of music I like. There seems a harmonious understanding between instrument and player—notes and sound. Nothing formal or intrusive ; but melodies that frame themselves into words—a snatch of song dropped into a void as it were—then the answering echo of chords phrased into grand and beautiful messages of triumph, or of joy. I never tire of listening to him. You cannot imagine what it was to have him in that wild bush life. The McKayes were simply 'daft' about him, to use their own expression."

"I wonder," I said, "that he did not marry one of them. I'm sure Jessie would never say him nay."

His eyes flashed quickly into mine in the clear betraying moonlight.

"He is young yet," he said, "too young to commit that fatal mistake. A man should be quite sure of his own mind and his own strength before giving himself up to any woman. Unfortunately we too often allow passion to blind us, and waste all that is best in our hearts on someone utterly worthless."

"Do you think," I asked quickly, "that Douglas has done that? Did he ever say so?"

My jealous thoughts flew swiftly to Mrs. Dunleith. Perhaps she had played a part in Douglas Hay's life that I knew nothing about, but for which he suffered.

"He has never been very confidential," said Huel Penryth. "Men seldom are, I fancy ; but he has lost youth and faith. A man has generally to thank a woman for that."

"I think," I said coldly, "that we have as little, or as much, to thank men for."

"A case of *quid pro quo*, you fancy. But I think you idealize more than we do—you don't make sufficient allowance for a nature—physique—mind, that are different to your own. Women are shut away from most temptations, men thrown forcibly into them. You would have the intensity of passion, the purity of youth, the strength and force of manhood, the chivalry of romance, and yet a life colourless as an untempted

angel's! To fail in one point is to fail in all. Women will forgive any crime save infidelity."

"Is it not the greatest against love? Would you pardon it in us for any excuse we might offer?"

"The two cases must always be relative to their surroundings. A man's heart may never waver from the devotion it has once bestowed, but his attentions, his interest, his passions may do so."

I shook my head. "It is hard to convince a woman of that, and a woman who is innocent, and loving, and passionately faithful. It seems to her that what she gives she should also receive; it is surely her right. What a hard and fast line you draw for us. No word, no look, no thought must waver—but for yourselves, you ask the wide world and perfect liberty, and a passive acceptance of what you choose to bring back to us?"

"Is not your nature somewhat unforgiving, Mrs. Campbell?"

"Perhaps," I said bitterly, "but how am I to help that, if it is my nature?"

"You are quoting me against myself," he said, with another of those penetrating glances. "It is possible to modify, to soften, to subdue. But I misjudged you by that question. Your nature is not as relentless as you pretend, but circumstances have helped to mar its original gentleness."

"The conversation is drifting into personalities. After all what does it matter about one's mental discomforts? Women's lives especially are made up of minutiae; they can get excitement, pleasure, interest out of small things. We flatter ourselves we play an all-important part in your lives, but we do not really—not the generality of us, unless——"

"Well," he said as I paused, and stood for a moment looking over the quiet loch, with the starlight mirrored in its depths."

"Perhaps," I said hesitatingly, "I ought not to say it. But I was about to add, unless we should chance to be very beautiful or—very wicked."

"I think you are right," he said.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE DAWN.

"Come forth into the light of things ;
Let Nature be your teacher.

* * * * *
"And life is thorny, and youth is vain,
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.

* * * * *
"They stood aloof—the scars remaining
Like cliff which had been rent asunder."

THE idle dreamy days drifted on, and the white wings bore us from place to place, and I was fain to confess that the Laird had not exaggerated the wild and picturesque beauty of his native land.

Perhaps my eyes had grown weary of that one great stretch of woodland around and beyond Corriemoor, at all events they were ready to delight in and praise the ever-shifting, changeful beauty that now they rested upon.

For up here, in this region of loch and mountain, there were perpetual bursts of colour and loveliness; the blue and grey and purple and gold of the sky, the brown and ruddy colouring of the hills, the soft floating mists that ever and again would part and reveal undreamt-of beauties, the rippling azure water, the great dashes of shadow where the lochs narrowed between the towering heights. Then in some sudden pause of stillness would come the soft whistle of the curlew, or the stir of moving wings as some great bird sped seawards, or the splash of the silver-scaled salmon leaping into air and sunshine and waking echoes in the quiet summer noon.

Sometimes when the wind failed us, as it did for two or three days at a time, we would make excursions among the chain of islands, the men doing their best to shoot any eatable wild fowl for our larder, or catch the fish that swam in glittering shoals through the clear sapphire waters.

Now and then we would land at some fishing village of stalwart brown men, and bare-armed, short-kirtled women, and the Laird would talk to them in their uncouth-sounding language to the evident delight of *both parties*, and wonderful would be the stories of

dangers and toils, and of hairbreadth escapes, that he would gather from them.

I must confess they were a marvel to me ; their cheerfulness and content, their genial yet shy grace of manner, and the hospitable offerings of herring, or lithe, or mackerel, which were invariably made, and for which no payment would ever be taken, unless in the shape of a "dram," or some gift of woollen shawl or petticoat for wife or bairn.

And again there would be the ever beautiful spectacle of dashing waves breaking white and stormy in the gloom of some deep sound, or some days of gloomy skies broken up by sudden sunlight, or night of misty moonshine glancing on cove and bay, and then day would dawn fresh and sparkling, and there would be the stir of feet on deck, and white sails spread to catch the welcome breeze, and the pleasant lapping of water as the yacht sped merrily along to fresh scenes and new beauties.

How genial and pleasant the Laird had become ; I scarcely recognized the quiet stolid Donald Campbell in this bustling and quaintly humorous personage who cracked jokes with the sailors, and took his turn at the steering, and was so interested in the fisher-fleets and life of the lonely islanders—who made light of all difficulties, even the hardships of failing wind and unsupplied larder which occasionally troubled us, and only laughed when we were blown out of our course by contrary winds, or wasted long hours in fruitless "tackings" to gain some harbour.

On the whole, we were not a badly assorted party as yachting parties go, for limited space and companionship are not always conducive to harmony. I could not but notice, however, as the days drifted by, that Robert McKaye's attentions to Bella became somewhat marked and impressive. Invariably she was the companion of his walks or excursions, the two girls seemed always apportioned to Douglas and the Laird, and Huel Penryth to me. Thrown as we were together, Douglas Hay's avoidance and coldness of me were almost noticeable, but I had schooled myself into accepting our present position as the safest, and, indeed, the only one left us to adopt. I wondered sometimes why he had agreed to join our expedition. I felt certain he, of all the party, was uncomfortable, ill at-ease, and restless.

He would laugh and jest with the girls in the old random manner; he would play and sing to us in the evenings, or inaugurate a reel, or strathspey, or schottische on deck, but the laughter wanted the heart whole ring, and the dance seemed to lack the gay abandon which had once been so characteristic of his movements.

One morning I rose very early and went down to the shore. A cold wind was blowing from the sea, the sky was still grey and colourless, waiting for the warmth of the sun, which had not yet appeared above the heights, or touched the black hollows of the tossing waves.

The yacht lay at anchor some distance off. We were to go on board after breakfast and proceed up the Crinan Canal, making Oban our next halting place, if the wind favoured us. I had slept badly all night, and feeling too feverish and restless to remain in bed any longer, had resolved to take a long walk before returning to the comparative inactivity of yacht life.

Sky and sea and coast had a strangely weird look under the dusk of the sunless morning; but as I went on over the rough rocks and boulders, a strange light burned like gold through the filmy mist that hung like a curtain in the east. I stood still and watched it, breathless with sudden wonder. That colourless film was suddenly transformed into a rose-coloured veil of transparency and ethereal beauty, which again was suddenly lifted and swept asunder as by a living hand, while, all around its edges, and all around the clouds that drifted seawards, broke a thousand sharp jewel-like lines of flame, and then over the dull land and water spread a flush of faint pink, deepening into yellow gold as the sun rose higher and yet higher. Then came the stir of awaking life in the gorse and heather, where the young birds fluttered joyously, undisturbed as yet by sportsman's gun, and the slow flapping of wings as the stately herons sailed landwards to some rocky pool, half hidden among the tall dark reeds.

I stood there with clasped hands, drinking in the beauty of the scene, and the loveliness and strangeness of it. It was the first time I had seen the sun rise and the day break amidst those mountain solitudes. I felt *selfishly* glad to be the only spectator, to feel that I

and the new day had the world to ourselves, with no intrusive voice or presence to disturb our enjoyment.

There are just the times in life when one needs no companionship save one's own, when even the best loved voice would jar on the feelings that are voiceless and untranslatable—when thought seems to have a majesty and depth beyond all mere outward expression. Some such moment was this to me, and I sank down on the rough stones and for a moment hid my face in my hands, overcome by a rush of feelings that were sharp as pain and sweet as joy, and yet moved me rather to tears than words.

As I lifted my head at last and looked up at the brightening sky, I saw I was no longer alone.

Some few yards from me, his arms folded across his chest, his eyes fixed coldly but intently on my face, stood—Douglas Hay.

The first surprise of seeing him so near and alone was almost a shock to me. I did not move. I only looked quietly back at him, while a great stillness and numbness seemed to chill my heart, and creep through my veins.

"I saw you come out," he said, "and I followed you."

I was silent. The abruptness of his words, the pallor of his face, the strange look in his eyes, held me speechless with a sudden vague terror. For one swift moment the hands of Time went back. We were standing together under the brooding darkness of the Hill of Fairies, and the light of sunset, not of sunrise, was upon a pleading face that vainly sought relenting or forgiveness in mine.

I sat there waiting for further words, my eyes on the roughened water that still looked green and grey in the morning mists. It seemed to me that, in its restlessness and mystery of distance, it was not unlike the human lives that meet, and seem to touch, and yet can drift so utterly—utterly—apart.

It might have been a moment, an hour, that Douglas stood there pale, and stern, and watchful. Then he came nearer and seated himself beside me on the rough rocks.

"Why were you crying just now?" he asked abruptly.

"I—was not," I stammered, then suddenly put up my hand to wet cheeks and felt confused at the needless falsehood. "I—I—hardly know," I stammered. "I had been watching the sunrise. It was all so wonderful,

so beautiful, and yet there is something sad in such beauty. It recalls youth, and innocence, and peace. If only the new day could wash our souls clean from sins and errors, as it seems to cleanse the world from gloom and darkness !”

“Fanciful, but impossible,” he said, with something almost like a sneer in his voice. “I think the day would have enough to do if that task was set before it.”

Presently he continued. “I was watching the sunrise too, but certainly it had no such softening effect upon me as you seem to have experienced. I am sick of the sea and the mountains, sick of the daylight that has no hope in its dawn, no rest in its death. Athole, do you remember the day we went to the Witch’s Cave ?”

“Yes,” I said wonderingly ; “how long ago it seems.”

“And her prophecy has come true,” he said gloomily. “You did marry another man, and yet, oh, how sure I felt of you then.”

“And I of you,” I said. “But why speak of it again ? Have we not agreed to bury the past. It is so useless to recall that time.”

“I know it. Do you suppose I would have come here, have consented to become your husband’s guest, if I had not thought I was strong enough to keep the past in the background ? You cannot say that I have forced myself upon your notice. I flatter myself I have grown quite an adept at self-effacement.”

His face so hard—his voice so bitter, and yet—oh ! that look in your eyes, Douglas, Douglas !

“It was not easy always,” he went on. “Perhaps Huel’s praises of you made it harder. I—I think I am jealous of him—though, Heaven knows, I have no right to be. Sometimes I grow half mad, listening and joining in with those chattering magpies of girls, and straining my ears all the time for the low, sweet tones I remember so well—that are so kind and gentle, and sweet to everyone but the poor devil who values them most.”

“Oh, Douglas !” I said—and a sudden rush of pity thrilled my pulses. Instinctively I turned to him, and laid my hand on his arm.

“I am sorry for you ; indeed—indeed I am—but it is best I should be hard and cold—or seem it. If there were any use—any hope——” (my voice broke—a sob caught the words and stifled them).

"I know I behaved very badly," he said—his own voice unsteady and uncertain now. "Oh! if you knew the times and times that I have cursed my folly. Sometimes I look back, and I cannot believe we are really parted. I see that room, and you in your white dress—and I hear the merry music of the reel we danced—and——"

"And you are singing again of the 'Braw Wooer,'" I said. "Did you think you left an aching heart behind you that night, Douglas?"

"No," he said, "I did not. I was jealous—miserable—reckless—then came a scene with my father, and, in one of my mad impulses, I tore off to Edinburgh."

"And to—Mrs. Dunleith?"

His face flushed. "Were you really jealous of her, Athole? It seems so strange. A man cannot be false, or what he considers false—when he loves one woman. All others are but pale reflections. He sees her face, he hears her voice, even as he looks into other eyes, and seems to listen to other voices—and his clasp has no passion, and his kiss no rapture, and weariness and disgust are all he bears—even after brief forgetfulness. Oh, believe me, there never yet was a man who tried to cheat himself into such forgetfulness, who did not suffer a thousand-fold for every moment of oblivion he had purchased."

The water brightened at our feet—the birds' songs rose louder and clearer as the day wooed them from bough and brake. The great heights took light and colour from the glowing sky. The throbbing pulses of Nature beat afresh in the waking world; only to us—poor drift-weed of poor Humanity—came no gladness and no hope. Nothing but the sorrow of vain regrets, the stab of remembered pain.

Again Douglas spoke. "You used to be very truthful, Athole. I wish you would tell me why you were crying, when I found you. Are you unhappy?"

My eyes met his—answering his question before my lips.

"Yes—and yet not altogether unhappy. It is a passive, not an active condition of mind—born chiefly of dissatisfaction. Now, are you satisfied with my truthfulness?"

"Perfectly."

The answer was concise and cold. Again silence fell

between us. The sun seemed veiled, the stillness grew almost painful. I moved restlessly in my rocky seat.

He started and looked down at me.

"Shall we walk on?" he said. "Unless you are going back to the hotel? But no-one will be up yet, I am sure."

"I am not going back yet," I said, with a little shiver. I felt cold and cramped, after sitting there so long.

"May I come with you?" he asked, unceremoniously. "Don't say 'Yes,' if you would rather not. You needn't play the hypocrite with me!"

"If you wish, you may walk with me," I said.

He held out his hand to assist me over the rough stones, and we walked silently on together in the golden morning light.

* * * * *

"Do you know," said Douglas, suddenly, as we ascended the hill-side, leaving the loch behind us, "that I once perpetrated the folly of keeping a diary? It was when I had parted from Scotland, and—gone far on my way to new lands and new scenes. I began it on the ship that was wrecked—and, strange to say, although I lost most of my possessions, I managed to save that. I found it the other day among a lot of papers and letters. I wonder if you would care to see it?"

"Indeed, I should," I exclaimed eagerly.

"It will give you some idea of my life and feelings at that time," he said gloomily. "And also an account of my acquaintance with Penryth. You like him, do you not?"

"Very much," I said.

"I am glad of that. You may enjoy his companionship uninterruptedly from to-day."

"Why?" I asked, startled at the announcement. "What do you mean?"

"I am not going on with you all," he said, in a strained, cold voice. "I—I—well, there's no use beating about the bush. I can't bear it any longer, Athole. I—I have overtasked my strength, that is the plain, simple truth. I have tried to play at friendship; then tried to avoid you. I have schooled myself to betray no feeling—to pretend that we two, who once loved so dearly—are but the veriest strangers. Well, I have done my best—a man can do no more—but I tell you, frankly and honestly, it is beyond me. What your own feelings are,

it is not for me to say. God grant *you* may never know the fever and agony and turmoil and madness of mine! For as surely as we stand here now, Athole, the world our own, the silence and solemnity of the new day our only witness—I swear to you I have loved, and can love no living woman save yourself—and coldness and estrangements and effort and duty and honour—what have they done? What have they proved? Only that I love you more madly than ever I did in the years that are gone. Only—Oh, God of Heaven! To have them back—to have them back!”

CHAPTER III.

“AH! PARTING WOUNDS SO BITTERLY.”

I only know we loved in vain,
 I only feel—Farewell—farewell.
 * * *
 No words suffice the secret soul to show,
 For truth denies all eloquence to woe.
 * * *
 I could lie down like a tired child,
 And weep away the life of care
 Which I have borne, and yet must bear.

HE stopped and faced me as he said those last words, and I looked up and met his eyes, pale and apprehensive with fear.

“If this,” I said, steadying my voice with an effort, “if this is what you feel, Douglas, there remains only one thing to be done. You must go away—you are right in that decision. It is not safe, or wise, or honourable to be here. Oh—” and a sudden wave of hopelessness and bitterness seemed to break over me, sweeping aside all prudence and self-control—“Oh, why did you come with us at all? things were bad enough before, but now—”

“I thought you did not care any longer—that you would not feel—that it would be easy to play the part I had set myself—but oh, Athole, there never was a day or night I saw your husband speak to you, kiss you, take your arm in his possessive fashion, that I did not feel as if all the devils in hell were raging within me. If I *could* have killed him—you—myself—”

“Hush!” I entreated.

“I *must* speak—I *will* speak. It is the last time,

Athole—that I promise you. Surely there is some excuse. One can't always be bound hand and foot by conventionalities. If ever anyone has repented and regretted an error of youth, I have done so. I often think if you had only forgiven me that day when I asked you, if you had only seemed to pity me or feel sorry for me, all would have been different. I did not think you would have put this barrier between us. I did not think you were the sort of girl to make a loveless marriage, however attractive, or however persuaded. But I was wrong."

I was silent. It seemed somewhat strange to hear him condemning my actions when he had been the cause of so much suffering to me. I listened, letting my thoughts drift to and fro, while I steadied myself to seem indignant and hurt, as indeed I was.

"Is any woman to be believed?" he went on; "they are all false at heart it seems to me. Even Penryth has not escaped their invariable treachery and faithlessness. His life has been utterly spoilt for him, and almost every man I have ever spoken to has the same story to tell. A woman is only faithful when you are by her side—her slave and adorer. Leave her for ever so brief a space, she listens to the next voice, lends herself to the next flattery. Forgetfulness is so easy to her. Her nature is small, and small things content it. When a man loves he stakes heart, soul, life, on that love. But he doesn't parade it to the world, or make a fuss about it, and the woman doubts him."

"You are talking at random," I said quietly. "You cannot with any truth blame me for what has happened, and you know it very well. I will not deceive you—I will not say that I am happy. This must be the last time that the subject is discussed between us, and I can afford to be perfectly frank. No doubt if I could have my time over again, I would act differently. I would not marry as I have done. But it is too late now for regrets, as I told you before. And I do not think it is manly, or even kind of you, to bring these accusations against me. Whatever I have done I owe to you. I gave you all that was best in me—my youth, my love, my trust. You know how I was rewarded. Why do you begin to blame me now for any pain you suffer? I do not *justify my marriage*, but at least I was under no obligation

to you. I was free to make it, and a thousand and one circumstances will sometimes entangle a girl into my position. She hardly knows herself how it all comes about. Your own act had parted us. Had you ever said——"

"I said all I dared that day we parted, and you were so hard and cruel to me. Even then some vague idea of winning fortune and fame and laying them at your feet was in my mind. I did not speak of it, I knew I had placed myself in a false position, and women young and innocent and romantic as you were, Athole, are far more exacting than those of older years."

"You ought to know," I said bitterly. "You have tried both."

"Will you never forgive or excuse that old folly?" he cried passionately. "If you only knew how ridiculous it seems to me that you should ever let it trouble your memory for a single moment."

"I only know the change it brought," I said wearily. "I only know how I suffered for what you think an 'excusable folly.'"

He was silent for a moment. We were still walking on, up the steep and hilly path, the leaves above our heads all gold-streaked by the sun, the murmur of a stream coming softly to our ears as it flowed unseen under cover of tall ferns.

He stopped suddenly and took my hands in both his own, forcing me to look up in his face.

"It is best for me to go," he said. "I ought never to have come on this yachting cruise, but Penryth was so keen about it. However, it will be easy to make some excuse, my father's health—certainly that is no fiction—and I will take the steamer back from here. Huel can go on with you to Oban. He and the Laird seem the best of friends. Indeed I am the only marplot to the party. No one will miss me or care, and I shall stay at Inverness until Huel joins me. Then I am going with him to his Cornish home, and after that I suppose we shall be off to Australia again. I—I have no wish to remain in Scotland now."

The slight emphasis on the "now" told me all that was necessary. The dull ache in my own heart answered him in the silence. I could find no words that were not *self-betraying*.

The last time, the last time—that was all I could think.

The last time to stand face to face, the last time to hear his voice speaking without the cold and formal restraint that it always held in the presence of others.

The last time! Yes, it had come to that, as I might have known it would come. Who can play for ever at friendship and decorum when love cries out for answer or regret? Each day the danger had crept nearer and nearer. I acknowledged it now, and I thought to myself that the wisest and bravest thing Douglas had ever done was this sharp and resolute severance from the peril he foresaw, and the deception to which we had unwittingly drifted.

My hands lay passive in his clasp. How still it was up on this quiet hill-side. How soft the hazy sky looked through the dark green boughs. What a dreamy spell breathed in the quiet air that seemed to wrap us in its peace and perfume, and bid our tired hearts rest and vex themselves no more.

But that was not to be. Youth's follies and mistakes had yet to exact their full reward of penance, rest was a long way off on the journey of life.

"Why don't you speak?" said Douglas suddenly. "You look so white and strange. What is it? I cannot flatter myself that you care very much. My absence will be a relief, I make no doubt."

"It is the best thing you could do," I said with effort.

"How coldly you say that. It is nothing to you if my heart breaks—nothing to you if life becomes a daily torture."

"Oh, Douglas—Douglas!" I cried, breaking down at last. "Why do you tell me this *now*?—now, when it is so useless, so base, so wrong! Surely you might be brave enough to leave me in peace. God knows you have given me enough misery to bear."

"Not more than you have given me."

He dropped my hands and turned aside abruptly. He seemed to be doing battle with himself, and some feeling that he knew to be unworthy.

"I—I meant to ask you something when I followed you this morning," he said at last, his voice low and strained as if he feared its natural force might betray *more emotion than was desirable*. "But I will not do

it now. After all I have no right to add to your unhappiness, I—who first caused it. I think you would soon forget—I hope so, though I know your memory is a faithful one."

"It does not matter," I said. "Whether I forget soon or late. You have pretended to think me faithiess. But, I should like to know—what was it you followed me to say this morning?"

The blood flushed duskily to the roots of his brown hair.

"Do not ask me. I should be ashamed to tell you; perhaps the dawn, the silence, the beauty here, has brought purer thoughts and feelings than the fevered dreams and desires of night. I do not want you to think worse of me than you do. And if you knew what was in my mind——"

"Then you did not follow me only to say you were going to leave us," I said, as he paused.

"If you *will* know——" he said, then suddenly held his breath, and looked away from me to where the sea lay flushed and warmly bright under the fuller glory of the risen sun.

"I came to tell you," he went on brokenly, "that I had read you better than you read yourself. That I know how empty and joyless your life is—that I, too, am weary of this aching longing. Oh, Athole, if you knew what my love for you has become—a raging fever, a torture that never ends. There are times when only to feel your arms round me, the touch of your lips on mine, as . . . as once I felt them, I would gladly die. And if you felt that too . . . if you knew half the agony of longing and passion, and self-reproach that your every word and look can bring, you would not wonder that I should say to you what . . . what I meant to say, Athole, an hour ago."

I drew back—I felt the blood ebbing slowly from face and lips; I grew cold and sick, and bitterly ashamed.

"Did you think you had not wronged me enough, Douglas?" I said.

The old fierce light of anger leaped into his eyes.

"Have I not told you that to see you, meet you, be near you day by day, was a harder task than I could school myself into bearing. The sweetness of every moment was an hour of bitter agony. I—I wondered

if you guessed or shared my unhappiness. I *hated* you often for giving me such pain, and for your own quiet unconsciousness of it. Was it always unconsciousness, Athole?"

I shook my head. "As you suffer now, Douglas, so I suffered in the past. I told myself that for love that died the death of unworthiness there could be no possible resurrection. And yet . . . it was harder to kill than I imagined."

"Your husband does not love you as I love you," he cried, with sudden passion. "Oh, my darling, my darling, don't look at me like that! I am wrong, mad if you will, but let me speak just this once—never shall word or prayer of mine trouble you again."

"It is dishonourable to listen to words like these, Douglas, and you know it."

"It would be, if I had been nothing in your life before—if I wooed you only as the wife of another man; but I loved you first, Athole, and you—say what you will, he is not to you what I am."

"What you *were*, Douglas."

"I deserve the rebuke. Well, this is our third parting. It is right it should be final—when the seas are between us again——"

His voice broke. He turned away, I saw his chest heave, I saw the shudder of the strong young frame. . . . Everything seemed to grow dark around me. A wave of passion and regret swept over my heart, and all and everything was forgotten for one brief moment save that wild, ill-fated love which had worked such havoc in both our lives.

"It is harder than I thought," he said hoarsely, and turned suddenly to me. "Is it good-bye, Athole, or——?"

Passionately I interrupted him. "It *is* good-bye, it must be. Why do you torture me so?"

"You don't know what I bear, I suppose you don't care, either. If—if you did——"

"Yes?" I said, growing suddenly cold, and lifting steady, searching eyes to his.

"Don't look at me like that, Athole, as if you hated me—as if all the past were nothing."

"It is nothing now, Douglas."

He drew a long, deep breath. "I don't believe you—

I can't. A woman doesn't change so suddenly. Listen, listen—no, don't turn away; I will hold you to my heart and tell you all that is there, though I die for it. Oh, my darling, my darling, why are you so cruel? I want you, and you want me. Let us end this misery once for all!"

His strong arms held me, his lips touched mine. Wildly I looked around as if seeking means of escape. There seemed to be something cowardly in those wild words, this forced embrace, and my only feeling was one of repulsion and indignation. "Let me go," I cried, "I will not listen. Do you hear, I *will* not. I hate you!"

His arms dropped to his side. He looked at me as if I had struck him, every drop of blood gone from the young, haggard face.

"God forgive you, if you mean that," he said.

But I only wrenched myself away, and flew as if my feet were winged, down the steep hill side, nor ever rested or drew breath till I was in my own room, and could fling myself sobbing and exhausted on the bed. Indignation and remorse raged wildly through my mind. I could not think clearly or calmly.

It seemed as if a great black gulf had yawned suddenly at my feet, and in shuddering horror I recognized the peril to which I had blindly stumbled.

I knew now why he had followed me, what he had meant, and yet not quite dared to say. This was his love—to shame me in my own eyes, and in the eyes of all who had ever loved or cared for me. To make me no better than Dora Dunleith, or any of her sisterhood—women to whom love was but a passion of the hour, a fancy for a handsome face, or trick of manner; the base desire for conquest, or caprice of coquetry. And I—oh, how I had loved him, thought of him, suffered for him!

A hot flush of agonized shame covered my face, scorching even the tears that had burst tempestuously forth. "I am rightly served," I said to myself, springing from the bed as suddenly as I had thrown myself down, and pacing to and fro the little narrow chamber, like a caged animal. "I might have known what would be the end, what sort of thing a man's love is! Oh, why was I so foolish, why did I betray that I still cared, that I had not forgotten. What must he have thought of me to *hint even at such a thing, as—as——*"

But not even to myself could I say it.

I threw myself down on my knees ; my whole frame was shaking with tearless sobs. "Keep him from me, oh God !" I prayed wildly. "As there is mercy, or help for the weak and the tempted, keep him from my life for ever, now !"

A knock at the door made me rise to my feet. A voice, the Laird's voice, was speaking. How kind, and strong and honest a sound it had.

"Athole, my dear, we're waiting breakfast ; are ye no ready?"

CHAPTER IV.

FETTERS AND FANCIES.

"I waive the quantum o' the sin,
The hazard o' concealing.
But oh ! it hardens a' within,
And petrifies the feeling."

* * * *

"But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed."

—BURNS.

It is a beautiful clear night, and the full moon is pouring down a flood of silver splendour over the bay and the dusky island of Kerrara.

Here and there the green or red lights of a passing boat flicker on the smooth water. Behind the little town of Oban, the tall and sombre hills are touched with a cold, grey luminous haze ; the houses look white as marble as they front the shore.

We are all sitting on deck, and drinking in the quiet beauty of the scene. The night is very still, save for the lapping of the water against the sides of the yacht, or the splash of an oar as a boat passes us and glides into the silence of the bay. The sound of the sea is only a murmur, haunting the air from far-away shores, and its monotonous plaint holds a melancholy significance as it rises and falls on the hushed calm of the summer night.

"It is very beautiful," I hear the girls say, even their bright chatter subdued for once.

"It is more than that," answers Huel Penryth's voice.

"It is as wonderful and solemn as a dream. Nothing looks quite real in that wonderful white light. The town is like a fairy city, the night seems full of far-off

echoes. It is a night for music and poetry, they alone express what one feels."

"Is it not a grand sight?" break in the bluff harsh tones of the Laird's voice. "Show me the equal in any of your foreign countries."

He has a big pipe in his mouth, a Glengarry cap on his head, his hands are in his pockets, and he stands there, bluff, sunburnt, hearty, truly the very antithesis of the "poetry" of the scene that Huel Penryth suggests.

I dislike pipes intensely. A man may look picturesque in almost any garb and under almost any circumstances, and a cigar or cigarette will not detract from such picturesqueness. But a pipe—it is vulgar, it is commonplace, it is objectionable to sight and smell. It seemed to me to mar the picture and destroy the harmony of the whole scene.

If a woman's tastes and instincts are being perpetually offended, and she is obliged to keep silence, it must have a harmful effect upon her nature in course of time.

The great troubles and trials of life are not so destructive of temper, patience and forbearance, as the perpetual discordance, and unsuitability and jarring discomfort of smaller evils that are perpetually recurrent, and have to be "put up with" for sake of peace and quietness.

It is on these smaller rocks that so many matrimonial ships have foundered; it is often from some pebble of triviality thrown into the waters of that most uncertain harbour, that the ever widening circles of discord, impatience, and intolerance have spread.

If ear and eye and sense are being perpetually offended, if taste is perpetually outraged, it stands to reason that our temper must suffer in due course. Yet such offences are not counted as wrongs, though they are productive of harm. Often the mere want of courage to speak of them as "offensive" leads the sufferer to brood silently and sullenly over them in secret, a dangerous and unwholesome plan, and one which rather increases, than remedies the evil. Yet, where is the man who would not be offended and astonished if his wife said bluntly: "Such and such a habit of yours annoys and irritates me beyond endurance. I know you are honourable, upright, affectionate, an admirable father and husband, but oh! if you only would not smoke that

odious pipe, or would not wear those creaking boots, or would not eat and drink so noisily, or kiss me with lips still wet from that 'last' brandy and soda, or wear clothes that are an insult to taste and are an aggravation to sight, if you would only remember that the same delicacy and reverence given to the girl you wooed would be equally appreciated by the woman you have wedded, then we might still be happy. As it is——"

Well, anyone who has known two—three—at most *five* years of matrimony, will be able to fill in that blank.

If men and women expect to live out a course of wedlock in perfect content and veracity, they expect nothing short of a miracle. In ninety-nine out of every hundred cases the mere empty shell is all that is left; disappointment, disillusion, disgust. Yet how well we all mean to begin, and perhaps *do* begin. It is the living up to that beginning that is so hard, and after a time lapses into mere habit or endurance, though none of us are truthful enough to say so. The very hopelessness of rebellion, the very impossibility of speaking out frankly and honestly, will sometimes mar and ruin a nature more weak than wicked, and it finds itself drifting into hypocrisy from sheer inability to grasp the nettle of offence.

If we were but brave enough to be truthful to each other from the first; and yet perhaps, the confession of disappointment, the implied rebuke, the stab to self-pride, the avowal of a detected weakness, would lead only to anger or be considered unjust.

The armour of our vanity is a close and curious network, and we like no shaft to penetrate it. Then again, we grow certain of our "property" assigned so securely by laws of Church and State, and by ceasing to pay it the compliment of doubt, incite it to re-assert its value.

Other eyes may court, other lips desire; the flutter of gratified vanity stirs again in the breast whose deeper treasures have not been sought or esteemed. "Here at last is appreciation, here is that idealized and lofty sentiment, lacking in the voice and heart that only grant to duty what we would claim from love," and so on and so on till the old, pitiful tale is all that is left to tell—a broken heart—a ruined home—another life that signs itself "*mangé*" and drifts on a sea of error to the dark rocks of shame and retribution beyond.

So far, so swiftly had my thoughts run, when Huel Penryth's voice sounded by my side again.

"Mrs. Campbell! I have addressed you three times. What are you dreaming about in that absorbed manner?"

I started. I had forgotten place and surroundings. The girls were at the other end of the little vessel, bending over to watch the reflections in the clear water. The Laird and his friend were with them.

"I am afraid I was rather 'in the clouds,'" I said. "And it all commenced about—well, could you guess? Try."

"It had something to do with smoke," said Penryth. "I am sure of that, because I was watching your face when your husband was speaking, and it was—expressive."

I laughed as I met his glance. "You are right. I must confess a dislike to pipes."

"Why not say so?"

"What use? It is a habit of years. I, who have only lately appeared on the scene cannot ask such a sacrifice. I hate to see a man making a martyr of himself. And it is always apparent."

"You have learnt that the trivialities of daily life make a goodly sum in its arithmetic. I wonder we ever let any habit get the mastery of us. It is such a mistake; but we do."

"Few of us are wise enough or strong enough to become philosophers, like yourself."

"I am not that. I might parody Shelley and say, 'I have learnt in suffering what I preach in words.' I have never looked upon myself as a person likely to win or deserve sympathy. My childhood was lonely, my youth was wrecked, in its very first years, by treachery. Those are the hard lessons. We are malleable, and the blows fall sharp and strong and mould us for good or ill. Once we take shape, it is not possible to alter. We may break, but we never lend ourselves to the modeller's touch again."

I looked at him with the interest that he never failed to arouse in me. "Did you know," I asked, with a sudden timidity, born of that strange sad look of his, "that Douglas Hay left me his journal to read; the journal he kept through all that time you were together. I seem to know you so much better since I read it."

He looked somewhat disturbed.

"I did not know," he said; "the lad is a good lad,

but foolish and headstrong, and very passionate. I am not sorry he left us," he went on, lowering his voice. "I could see where he was drifting. I wonder others were not equally keen-sighted."

"You mean—you mean——?" I stammered, growing very pale as I met his eyes.

"I mean the Laird, of course. I knew full well how little use it is warning people; but, indeed, I have often longed to speak to you. May I? will you promise not to be offended?"

"Yes," I said, feeling too subdued for resistance.

"Well; I could more than guess at the secret of Douglas Hay's abrupt departure; perhaps you, yourself, do not know how you have altered since. Oh, I know you are brave and you try your best to conceal your wounds, but all the same you cannot always hide that you suffer from them. I want to be a friend to you. I want to help you, but I feel very powerless. If I told you that the Laird—that your husband guessed something of this—what would you say?"

"Surely—surely you are mistaken," I cried in dismay.

"Oh I hope he does not; what would he think?"

"Perhaps," said Huel Penryth gently, "he would take it more sensibly and kindly than you imagine. He cannot but feel that you were a mere girl when you married him. He cannot but acknowledge that Douglas Hay is attractive—strangely attractive to women. Youth turns to youth—it is only natural. No; I think you have little cause to fear him. I wish you could recognize what good and sterling qualities underlie that apparently rough exterior. Pray do not think I am presumptuous—but the world is so full of sorrowful histories, of mistakes that our own wilfulness turns into sins. And sometimes I think a word would help us, if only spoken at the right time."

I was silent. My eyes turned wistfully to the far grey line of the sea, and the shadows of the lovely island.

"Douglas has never told me anything," he went on in the same low, even tone, "except that for sake of some folly—some mad impulse—he wrecked the promise of a truer happiness than he could ever find again. Do not let your sympathy lead you into danger. Nothing that you can do now will mend the links of that broken

chain. There are not many things I believe in, as you know, but I do believe in a good woman, when I find one, and I hate to see her dragged into the mire by a man's selfish passions and gross desires. Better you should suffer one sharp pang now, than drag on a miserable, remorseful existence. Nothing can make up to a woman for the loss of her own self-respect. Believe me, that is the truth."

"Why do you say all this to me?"

"Because you are just in that half regretful, half remorseful mood, that is so dangerous. Men can get away from themselves and their memories; they gamble, smoke, drink, travel, work—but women fold their hands and brood. Sentiment is dangerous at such times; nature becomes a temptress, its very beauty has an appeal in it that is full of danger. You don't know at first how that subtlety of appeal steals over heart and senses, waking memories that are best lulled to sleep, stirring vague desires to a life of vivid longing. Even the wrongdoer wins softness and pity and regret in those hours. You picture him mournful, suffering, needing you as you need him. There are few men, indeed, who answer to the hopes and dreams of a loving and faithful woman. I am speaking to you very frankly, am I not? I have drunk of a cup so bitter, that the taste of the draught has never left my lips. One woman has given me back some hope, some faith, something of my lost youth. That woman is yourself. I vowed to be your friend, and I will keep that vow. It has given me courage to speak to you to-night. It gave me courage to warn Douglas Hay of the danger to which he was drifting."

"You—you spoke to him?" I faltered.

"Yes, the night before he left. And what I would like to say to you may sound harsh and hard, but believe me, I do not mean it. If you only knew how the sorrow in your face haunts me . . . If I were what the world calls 'religious,' I should doubtless preach of prayer and faith, and trust in a Divine power, that gives poor humanity stroke upon stroke of trial and suffering, 'for its good.' But I *can't* preach what I don't believe. There are certain *broad lines* of life, and they lead to certain results. We *cannot* choose a road that leads to the left with the

belief that some chance turn or break in it will conduct to the right. For every sin there is punishment, for every wrong there is retribution, for every error there is suffering. The full meaning and mystery of life none of us may know, but its lessons we are bound to learn; neither friendship, nor love, nor pity can ward off one blow that Fate has destined for us. Defenceless we are born, and defenceless we must meet whatever our destiny awards. It seems cruel, it seems unjust; yet who shall say it is purposeless. Were life a thing of dreams and days, and death its end, then, indeed, might every soul revolt and every heart rebel; but there seems a purpose in it, that from time to time is revealed in warning, in mystery; in some whisper that reaches the spirit in an hour that its mortal and material side could never unveil; then—we *know*. We do not explain—we do not perchance even speak of such a revelation, but for sake of it we rise with new courage, self-strung to patience and endurance. . . . Else, indeed, who would have courage to live life—to face death?"

His voice was low and melancholy, his eyes gazed far away into the clear space of the starry heavens, his face looked white and solemn in the white luminance of moon and stars.

I listened, awed and stilled and wondering, but insensibly a great peace and calm stole over the ache and fever of my thoughts. For the first time since that terrible hour, when I had prayed never again to look upon my lover's face, the softness of tears stole to my eyes and relieved something of the tension to which brain and heart and feeling had been subjected.

I was not offended, I was not hurt. I felt neither shame nor self-consciousness at the thought of my secret being known to this strange man. He seemed so different to all others, he stood on an eminence of thought and experience so lofty, that the fact of his stooping to pity and befriend me was almost a wonder.

A long silence fell between us. It was broken at last by the noisy questioning and remarks of the others, and we left the peace and beauty of the night for our respective cabins. Huel Penryth lingered a moment by my side.

"*You forgive me?*" he said.

I looked hastily up at the tall figure, the strange face, the dark mysterious eyes.

I made no answer. I think he did not need or expect one. He understood me better than I understood myself.

CHAPTER V.

TOSSED ON TROUBLED SEAS.

"A prince can make a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a' that,
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Guid faith, he mauna' fa' that."

* * * * *
"Princes and lords are but the breath o' kings,
'An honest man's the noblest work o' God.'"

ALL night I lay awake in my little cabin, listening to the murmur of the water against the sides of the yacht, and hearing over and over again those words of Huel Penryth's. They were wise words and true, and worth remembering.

I told myself it was foolish to waste life over a broken dream. Foolish to give myself over to imagination and romance. Foolish to suffer as I still suffered for sake of that long dead youth of mine, from which I had parted with such bitter tears. What was to be gained now by dreams so vain as those I had of late indulged? A miserable, feverish emotion—a restless discontent—mind and body on the rack. Was Huel Penryth right when he said I had wilfully chosen my own misery, wilfully closed my eyes to what life meant for me?

The wrench of that sudden parting had hurt me less than I had once believed possible. It had also opened my eyes to a danger to which I had been blindly drifting.

My cheeks grew hot with sudden shame, even in the night's quiet darkness, as I thought of that self-betrayal.

"I can't understand it," I said to myself helplessly. "Oh! if he had only kept away. Why did he return? Why did he give me all this suffering to bear over again? It was cruel . . . it was very cruel."

The tears rolled down in a weak and childish fashion. I seemed to have lost the self-control and hardness that had restrained emotion through those past days and hours.

"It will have to be fought all over again," I thought. "Just as I believed I had conquered and was safe. And

it is so much harder now. Oh, why do we love—why—why?”

Alas! there is no answer to that question, save that it is a law of the life we own.

The bitter shame and humiliation of it all stabbed me with cruel pain. To live, laugh, talk, to face other eyes, play at composure and indifference, and all the time bear the tortures of longing and regret. That was what love had given me to bear.

Oh! why could I not forget? Why could I not kill this pain and fever out of my heart?

“It is not even as if he were very worthy, or very good,” I told myself. “He is no hero—he has been selfish, reckless, cruel from the first—but yet I shall never love any other half so well.”

Yet, even as I said it, I knew I must brace every energy and every nerve to fight down this passion that had now become a sin. I could scarcely understand how from relentlessness I had turned to compassion, from anger to pity. How I had allowed myself to drift back to the old weakness and the old danger from which I had believed myself so far removed.

All my better instincts rebelled, all pride and dignity of womanhood rebuked me for the self-betrayal of that last morning on the hill-side, when the veil of silence had been rent between us two.

And the shame of discovery, the knowledge that not only Huel Penryth, but the Laird himself, had guessed something of what had caused Douglas Hay's abrupt departure, filled me with a great dismay.

Perhaps in a measure they served to brace my energies afresh, to make me see things in that fierce light of reflection from the minds of others, which is at once a revelation and a warning.

There is a moment in life when conviction pierces the veil of all subterfuge. The past and the present confront us. We see clearly at last, and truth forces acknowledgment from heart and lip. That moment was mine now.

I had escaped a great peril. My life felt broken and unstrung, but I was realizing by slow and sure degrees that its hours could not be passed in vain regrets and *vain longings*. I was unhappy, but I was not alone in my

unhappiness. Others had fought the same weary battle—others would fight it long after life had ceased for me.

"Is pain over then?" I wondered, turning fevered brow and tear-wet eyes to the waking dawn. And my heart whispered, "Not unless Death kills memory too."

* * * * *

The Laird had made but brief comment on Douglas's sudden departure, but the girls were loud in lamentation and regret.

"And he has missed the very best of the trip," had been the regretful remark of pretty Jessie McKaye, as the yacht made its way up to Skye, breasting the blue waters like some beautiful white bird.

We passed through Loch Etive, and then made for the Sound of Mull. The weather was still perfect, forcing me to recant my heretical opinions of the Scotch climate.

The misty blue sky and warm sunlight brought out all the soft tints and colours of the hills, and the hues of bracken and fern, and the pearly grey of the rocks, and the dappled cloud-shadows that floated across the deep valleys and wild dark stretches of forest.

It was intensely lonely amidst that ever-changing panorama of mountain and hill, and forest and sea. Scarce even a boat would break the monotony of the great foam-flecked stretch of waters, and the moan of breaking waves was only echoed by the wilder and more mournful plaint of the sea birds.

The loneliness and sadness oppressed me in a vague and melancholy way. The girls were merry enough. It mattered little to them apparently whether skies were grey or blue, or if storm threatened, or sunlight smiled. But to me it seemed that physical pain would have been easier to bear than this dull ache, this constant sense of repression, and the haunting dread that I had betrayed myself to others.

The Laird's candid eyes and bluff honest face seemed to me to have acquired a gravity and suspicion hitherto a stranger to them. He almost avoided me, and whenever we anchored and went on shore, as we so frequently did, if opportunity offered, I seemed to be always left to the escort and companionship of Huel Penryth.

We had had a month now of this idle, monotonous life, steering our course according to fancy, instead of

following the tourists' usual track. At Stornoway the weather suddenly changed, and we were advised to wait for three or four days until the gale had spent itself.

It was very dull and dreary in the little inn, watching the storm-clouds drift over the dull grey sky, and the rain beating miserably on the window panes, and listening to the wild warfare of wind and waves, as their fierce music filled the air through the long days and longer nights.

Sleep and I seemed to have become strangers to one another, and the strain on mind and nature began to show itself in a certain feverish unrest. I grew paler and thinner every day, and often I saw Bella eyeing me anxiously, as if she noted the change, but did not like to question me.

She herself seemed perfectly happy and content, and her merry laugh and face were as good as sunshine and sea-breezes to us all. It struck me at this time that the eyes of Robert McKaye — the Laird's friend — had acquired a curious habit of watching and following her about. As for the two girls they seemed to idolize her, and were never happy away from her.

I thought sometimes it would be strange if she accepted the position of stepmother, and went back with them to Australia.

I hinted this laughingly to her one evening, and was not a little surprised at the blushes and confusion that responded to my raillery.

"He is a very good man, and a very kind one," she said. "I'm not sure but what I might do worse, Athole."

"Do you think you would be happy?" I asked somewhat wistfully. The fact of losing her also out of my life made it take a graver, and more gloomy aspect.

"Well, I'm not a wee, romantic body like yourself," she said, laughing. "And I'm very fond of the McKayes, one and all, and of all things I should love to go to Australia. I'm not exactly desirous of spending all my days in Scotland."

And these were reasons for marrying! Well, I suppose they were as good as those of many other girls, and Bella's was a safe and sensible nature. She would never be wrecked and tempest-tossed on seas of wild and passionate emotion, never fret heart and soul with

love and jealousy, and fierce anger and agonized despair, as I had done.

"I know he is a very good, kind man," I said at last. "But he is old enough to be your father, Bella."

"Oh, what of that?" she said lightly. "I'm not of the sort that falls in love with foolish laddies and such like feckless beings. They're only a trouble and a vexation to one. I've always made up my mind to have a sensible, middle-aged husband, and here's my chance. Besides," she added, with a twinkle in her bright eyes, "when you are a member of a large family, it really becomes a duty to relieve them of the burden of supporting you longer than is absolutely necessary. And you know, my dear, there's not an atom of sentiment or romance in my composition. I simply couldn't fret and fume, and dream and poetize about a man. It may seem very odd, but I couldn't. It isn't in me."

"No," I said, "I don't believe it is. You will go down to your grave laughing. It is an enviable disposition, but I cannot understand it."

She looked at me keenly, and with a sudden gravity replacing the laughter in her eyes.

"What has come to you lately, Athole?" she said. "You don't look well, and your spirits are as uncertain as—well—as the weather. Are you wearying of the trip already—or—is it because Douglas Hay left us?"

I felt my face flush hotly.

"Bella," I said, "all that is over and done with. Do not speak of it again. I don't mind confessing that I am unhappy—very unhappy—but that is no new thing. I think my mind is a morbid and dissatisfied one. I have always wanted so much more out of life than it can give . . . That is a mistake. Perhaps as I grow older I shall grow wiser. I'm sure I need to."

"You seemed much brighter and happier when we first set out," she said.

"Have I not just told you that my nature is altogether wrong?" I said bitterly. "I grow tired of everything and everyone. I am always wanting to know, and to analyse, and to experience, and then when I do not get *any* deeper into a feeling, or the meaning of any action, *I feel so disappointed.* It never seems a bit like *what I imagined it would be.*"

Bella shook her head reproachfully.

"Foolish," she said. "How often must I say it? What a pity, little coz, that you were not one of a large family. You would soon have all dreaming and sentimentality knocked out of you. Depend upon it, life is safer and more wholesome when household duties and occupations demand your attention. I have never had time for fretting or repining, or 'analysing,' as you call it. And I am sure—I am quite sure, that life is a happier, more satisfying thing for me than it has been or can be for you!"

I looked at the bright face, the clear, honest eyes, the perfect content and genuine good humour of the whole expression.

"You are quite right, Bella," I said with a faint sigh of envy. "It has been, and it will be happier—always."

CHAPTER VI.

"POOR LASSIE!"

"And he is oft the wisest man,
Who is not wise at all."

* * * * *

"That best portion of a good man's life
His little nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love."

BEFORE we left Stornoway it was all arranged. Bella was to marry Robert McKaye, and return with him and his daughters to Australia at the end of their year's holiday.

She wrote to her folk in Inverness to acquaint them with the news—evidently taking their consent for granted—as did also the calm, sensible Scotchman whose wooing had been conducted on the matter-of-fact and rational principles peculiar to his nation. I regarded them both with feelings of curiosity and wonder. The change in their relative positions did not seem to make any difference in their manner to one another.

Robert McKaye gave as much of his attention to the Laird as to his affianced bride, and she laughed and jested, and took life in just the same careless, unembarrassed manner as ever. The girls looked upon her as a sister, and the new relationship apparently pleased *them greatly*.

I think I was the only one who did not approve of it, though I refrained from saying so. But I knew I should feel very lonely without my merry, good-natured cousin, and the thought of the wide seas separating us could only be a mournful and unwelcome thought to me.

At last the skies cleared, and the wind showed signs of favour, and we sailed out of Tobermory Bay, and made for Loch Scavaig and Coruisk with the intention of seeing the wonders of those wild places, and the Spar Cave and Glen Sligachan.

I heard the Laird telling Huel Penryth of the desolate and awful grandeur of this wild island, its black, silent waters, its jagged, twisted rocks, and all the sombre and ghastly loneliness that there held endless sovereignty.

Perhaps those graphic pictures produced a deep impression on my mind. I know the place affected me profoundly. We seemed gliding into a dark and unknown prison, from whence escape would be impossible. The melancholy and sleeplessness from which I had suffered, took stronger hold on me. Sometimes I was afraid I should fall ill, and I longed to ask the Laird to turn back, to leave this wild and fearful place, and take me home to Corriemoor again.

When I stood on deck in the cold, grey twilight, that here had none of Summer's warmth or brightness, I could not repress a shudder of aversion.

"Ye're no admiring it, Athole, I'm thinking," said the Laird, coming to my side, his hands in the pockets of his rough tweed suit—the unfailing pipe in his mouth.

"No," I said, with unflattering alacrity. "I think it is an awful place."

"Oh, nonsense, it's just grand," he said heartily. "A bit gloomy perhaps after sunset, but wait till to-morrow and you'll no' be so ready to find fault. A dash of sunshine makes a' the difference."

I was silent. It seemed impossible to fancy the sun bold enough to flash any warmth or brightness over the great black shoulders of Garsven, or lighting the desolate lake waters that reflected only bare and riven rocks, and echoed no more cheerful sound than the call of the water-fowl, or the hollow murmurs of the wind.

The yacht lay motionless in the deep, dark loch. All around were towering mountains, and the wild, fantastic

forms of cliff and rock, while as the twilight deepened, a pale blue mist gathered over the heights, and floated down like a veil with which the mountain spirits had chosen to shut in their haunted solitudes.

The Laird's voice again broke the silence.

"I'm afraid," he said, "you're not enjoying the trip so much as you fancied. But it will soon be over. No doubt," he added presently, "it's a bit dull now there's none o' the singing and the dancing and story-telling we aye got from young Douglas Hay."

I felt my cheeks flush with sudden warmth.

"I have not found it dull," I said quickly, "and I have enjoyed the whole trip immensely, but I cannot say I like this part of it."

"It would be a pity did we no' see the Spar Cave now we are so far on the way," he said.

"Oh, by all means let us see whatever ought to be seen," I said with forced cheerfulness. "I should be sorry to interfere with the plans you have made."

"But you must not think I would make any plans that might not please you," he said gravely. "I planned this trip for your sake; I really did wish to give you a little pleasure. After all, Corriemoor is but a dull place for a young thing—I ought to have remembered that long ago."

I was almost too startled to speak. I had never heard him express such concern or interest in my life. He had always seemed to take for granted that my tastes were identified with his own, and subservient to his wishes.

"You are very good," I said hurriedly, "and pray—pray do not think this has not been a great pleasure to me. It is only that lately I have not been quite strong or well, and here it is so bleak and cold. I am rather like a swallow for Southern latitudes," I added, with a little nervous laugh, as I saw how grave his face looked.

There was a long silence—uncomfortably long it seemed to me, used as I was to the Laird's "silent bars" as I called them.

Then—quite suddenly—he laid his hand on my shoulder—the big, rough hand that had never pleased my fastidious tastes. Its touch now was very gentle, and there was something almost deprecating in the *glance that met my own*. A faint gleam of moonlight

tell upon his face through the parting mists that veiled the sky; it was pale, serious, almost distressed.

"Poor lassie," he said very softly, and turned away.

* * * * *

I remained there leaning against the side of the yacht. I was trembling greatly. I wondered what had caused that sudden tenderness—that look of compassion. Had he really read something of my miserable secret, and did he attribute the change in me to Douglas Hay's departure? The thought stabbed me with sharp and bitter shame. Perhaps he now was repenting of the mistake he had made; perhaps he too recognised the fact that our marriage was altogether unsuitable.

Looking back on its brief years, I could not say that I had shown myself very loving, or very companionable, but then, on the other hand, he had been to the full as engrossed with his own pursuits and occupations as I in my sorrows and my dreams. He had never seemed to want me. There was very little sympathy between us; that subtle under-current of mutual liking and comprehension which makes two natures agree so easily and understand so readily what pleases, or interests, or absorbs each.

He had been unobservant and I had been reticent. He had lived his life in his old accustomed manner, and no doubt believed that I was perfectly content with it—forgetting how new and strange it must have seemed, and how dull and commonplace a one for a young girl who had no associates and no companions, and could not find engrossing interest in mere household drudgery.

"Oh, what a mistake it has been," I said to myself, now with a bitterness born of intense hopelessness. "Why did he not take my first No!—and believe it, or why was I so foolish as to yield? He could not have been more unhappy, but I might so easily have been less."

Even as I thought it, I felt a warm shawl wrapped about my shoulders. The Laird had returned to my side. I looked up gratefully.

"Thank you, Donald," I said.

I so seldom called him by his name, that I suppose it surprised him. His quick glance met mine with a flash of sudden pleasure.

"You've been aye long standing there, Athole," he

said, "will ye not walk a bit now, unless ye prefer to go below? The others are at card-playing and fortune-telling and such-like foolishness."

"Oh, I don't care to go below," I said, "and the night is getting clear. How wonderfully *white* the stars look," I added in amazement as I looked up at the sky, which now seemed of a curious lambent green—unlike anything I had ever seen before.

A faint wind brought with it the song of distant streams travelling seawards from the far-off mountain heights. The solemn stillness of the night held no other sound.

"They always look white up here," said the Laird. "I suppose it is something in the atmosphere. The place doesn't look so weird and whisht now—does it? And when you see it to-morrow in the sunshine, you'll think it's just wonderful—wi' all the colours of the coast, and the rocks and the clouds, and the loch reflecting them like a mirror. No doubt you think I'm ower fond of praising my own land," he added presently, "but I suppose it's but natural to a Scotchman."

"I think it's a very pardonable pride," I said. "I had no idea there was such beautiful scenery to be found in these wild regions."

"There's McKaye, now," he went on complacently; "he's travelled enough to ken what scenery is like and what foreign countries are worth; but he'll no' be content ever again wi' them; he's made up his mind to retire from business and lay his bones to rest here in his native land."

I laughed involuntarily.

"He ought not to talk of 'laying his bones to rest' as a reason for his return," I said. "What about Bella?"

"No doubt," he answered gravely, "she will do him good and cheer him up a bit. He's of a somewhat grave and serious nature."

"Well, she certainly is the very opposite," I said. "I always look upon her as a cure for low spirits, and dulness."

"You'll be missing her, I fear," he said, somewhat anxiously.

"Indeed, yes," was my candid and somewhat sorrowful response. "I am fonder of her than of any of my other cousins."

"Or—or anyone else here, I often think," he said with an odd, harsh little laugh.

I looked at him astonished. Was it possible, conceivable even, that he should mind my partiality?

"She is so bright, and has such a happy, contented nature," I said, "and she has always been so good to me."

"Have not other folk been—that?" he asked suddenly.

There was uneasiness in his tone, but his eyes, as I met their glance, were very kind and very anxious.

"Oh, yes," I said cheerfully. "You surely don't imagine I am finding fault with any of my kinsfolk?"

"Athole," he said, stopping abruptly and half facing me in the clear pale moonlight, "how old are you?"

"Nearly twenty now," I answered. "What made you ask?"

"I—I hardly know," he said, resuming his walk by my side. "Perhaps it was something McKaye said when he first saw you. And yet he's not proved himself much wiser. There's no' such a very great difference between your age and Bella Cameron's, only she's so big, and fine, and womanly, and has a managing way wi' her that you could never get, I'm thinking."

"Would you like me to get it?" I asked, laughing in spite of myself at the idea, "because I could ask Bella to teach me, you know."

He shook his head gravely.

"No, my dear, I would not have you changed—only—only——"

"Only what?" I said quickly, struck by something sad and almost regretful in his voice.

"Only," he said huskily, "I wish I could set you free again and see your face as it used to look—without that wistful, haunting shadow upon it. It's not a pleasant thought to me, my dear, that I brought it there."

"Oh, Donald!" I cried impulsively. A little catch in my breath frightened me. I dared not break down, yet I was so weak and nervous and unstrung that I could scarcely command myself.

I longed to lean my head against that strong arm I held, and sob out my misery and loneliness as a frightened child might have done. But what could I say that he would understand, and what would he ask that I could never explain?

Between us there had always been a barrier, and now it seemed to me that something of shame lurked in the background of these widening months of coldness and estrangement. The time had gone by for frank confidence. Regret and sorrow were all that he could feel for the mistake he had made; a mistake that in some way had made itself plain to him at last.

So I controlled myself by a strong effort, and he, waiting patiently for the conclusion of that impulsive sentence, must have felt that I had no will for confidence.

Silence fell between us again—silence whose brief space was filled with doubt and sorrow, till broken by the voices and the presence of others.

They came trooping up on deck, chattering and laughing, and full of admiring wonder at the scene before them. The lights of the yacht were shining on spar and rigging, and threw dancing reflections on the dark, rippling water. The stairs had grown larger and whiter as the night came on. There was a far-off sound of unseen waves, mingled with the cry of the sea-birds still fluttering restlessly from rock to rock.

"No one has brought us the promised plumage of those wonderful birds we heard so much of," I said, turning to the Laird; "I suppose the fowling-pieces in the saloon are only for ornament."

"Indeed no," he said eagerly; "were you wanting a wing or two? I would have got them for you long ago. But these are common sort of birds—a heron or a guillemot now would be worth having."

"You'll hardly get the guillemot here, will you?" said McKaye.

"There's no saying," the Laird answered; "out seawards yonder we might pick up wi' some. I won't forget," he added, looking at me.

"But I'm not so very anxious," I exclaimed eagerly, "and if it's any trouble—or risk——"

He laughed—his bluff, hearty laugh.

"Tut, tut, lassie, don't fash yourself. It's a poor creature Donald Campbell would be if he couldna' manage boat and gun at his time o' life—you shall hae your bird before we turn south again. It's no' often ye ask me for anything."

And there was a look in his face and his eyes as I met them under the white lustre of the shining stars, that I had never seen before—that was destined to haunt me for many a long day to come.

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

THE THRESHOLD OF SORROW.

“ And I walked as if apart
From myself—where I could stand,
And I pitied my own heart,
As if I held it in my hand—
Somewhat coldly—with a sense
Of fulfilled benevolence. . . . ”

AFTER that evening I began to regard the Laird with a speculative curiosity. He had shown himself to me in a novel light, and for the first time since our marriage I found myself studying the candid, honest face and kindly eyes, and wondering whether after all he did look upon me as “something better than——” well, not dog or horse—but farms and shootings, and tenants’ interests.

The narrow limits of the yacht were favourable enough for my studies, and as Bella and Robert McKaye were a good deal together the Laird was reduced to sharing my society, or that of Huel Penryth.

The latter, however, had taken a gloomy and absorbed fit upon him of late, and was always reading or writing, or making sketches of the wild scenes through which we passed.

The weather had changed to gloom and cold. The days were grey and dull, and the wind would moan drearily about the steep rocks and desolate hills, and the dark roughened waters. I longed indescribably to return. The nervous horror I had felt of these wild regions increased rather than diminished, and the tales and legends of the sailors, which the girls were always collecting and repeating, filled me with a superstitious dread for which I could not account.

A brief glimpse of sunshine and a paler tint of grey in the leaden skies induced us one morning to make the excursion to the Spar Cavern. To me it seemed that the fatigue and trouble requisite were ill repaid by the result.

When we left it the sea was rough and stormy again. The sun had disappeared sulkily behind great banks of clouds. We were all damp and chilled and tired—even Bella's infallible good spirits flagged, and her face looked pinched and blue. The little pinnacle scudded along through gathering mist, skirting the rocky coast and its numerous caverns. Here and there we could see the lofty peaks of the Cuchullins piercing the clouds, only to be hidden from sight the next moment by those thick, dense vapours.

I cowered down in the small boat, shivering in every limb, despite the thick wraps with which the Laird had covered me.

"Surely," I said, as we neared the yacht, "we have had enough of these regions now; not even the scenery is worth this incessant cold and damp and gloom. I should fancy the sun had forgotten the very existence of these islands."

"I wonder what you would say to Stornoway and the Lewis," said the Laird. "They are cold and stormy, if you like. This is nothing."

I shuddered. Spirits and health were alike suffering, and the trivial discomforts, at which we had all made merry at first, had now become sources of misery and depression that I seemed too weak to endure.

"I agree with Athole," said Bella, as we reached the yacht at last and were rejoicing over the prospect of luncheon in the shape of hot soup and grilled salmon. "It is very dreary here. I expect the weather has changed for a long time. Had we not better get back to Oban?"

There was a little discussion, but the girls had sided with Bella, and of course Mr. McKaye did the same. It was agreed, therefore, that if the wind favoured us, we should set sail next morning for the more genial coasts we had left.

The decision gave me more content than I had experienced for a long time.

I retreated to my cabin after luncheon on the plea of fatigue, and did not go on deck again until late in the afternoon.

There was a dull, yellow glow in the west—the yacht was heaving and tossing on the roughened waters of the

Loch, and the sky looked very dark and threatening. One of the sailors was looking out over the wild waste of waters through a spy glass. His face bore an anxious and perturbed expression.

"What are you looking at, Ferguson?" I asked, approaching him.

He started, and almost dropped the glass.

"It wass the Laird, and he'll be out yonder wi' only the lad, Davie, in that bit cockle-shell, and there's a squall coming up west. I ken weel it will just catch them round yon point. He was fair out o' his wits to venture."

"Do you mean to say the Laird has gone out there?" I asked anxiously; for the sea looked too wild and stormy for a small boat, and every moment the wind seemed gaining strength and fury.

"I'm meaning just that. It wass all for shooting some kind o' bird the lasses wanted, and the Laird he will take his gun and just hae the boat down and call wee Davie to steer, and was off. I'm fearing they'll no make the yacht the nicht."

"But what could they do?" I asked, in sudden alarm. "There's no place they could land—is there?"

He shook his head.

"There will be the caves," he said; "but I'm thinking it is out to sea they'll be carried. I canna make out the boat. 'Deed, it was fairly rash o' the Laird."

"Give me the glass," I said, and I raised it to my eyes, and searched the grey and foaming plain with anxious scrutiny.

The clouds had closed again over that momentary golden brightness—the west was grey and cold once more, and a dull, purple hue was spreading ominously along the misty horizon. There was no sign of the boat. The sea-birds were whirling and screaming around the wild crags, where already the water was dashing and foaming under the lash of the rising wind.

I dropped the glass and looked anxiously at the seaman.

"Ye'd best just gang below stairs, my leddy," he said abruptly; "the squall will be upon us in the blink o' an 'ee, and we'll just hae to make all sure and taut on deck here wi'out loss o' time."

"But the boat!" I cried in real alarm. "What will become of it? It was such a little frail thing to stand such a storm!"

Even as I spoke a hoarse, hissing sound broke over the momentary stillness—there was a fierce blast—a rush of breaking waves—and the whole force and fury of the tempest came roaring over our heads, till, in the gathering darkness, land and sea were alike shut out of sight.

The yacht trembled and strained at its anchor as the swell caught it and rocked it from side to side. I clung desperately to the shrouds to steady myself, while the rain burst forth in one fierce torrent, deluging the deck and drenching me to the skin.

Someone hurried towards me. I felt a hand on my arm—I heard a voice in my ear.

"You here, Mrs. Campbell? What madness! Let me take you down below."

The voice and hand were those of Huel Penryth.

I clung to him, unnerved by sudden terror.

"The boat," I gasped. "Oh, why did you let him go? It can never live in a storm like this!"

"Oh, nonsense," he said cheerfully as he tried to warm my icy hands and support me over the slippery deck. "It will be safe enough. Campbell is a first-rate seaman, and he would have seen the storm coming and made for one of the islands, or caves."

But his voice sounded far away and indistinct. The black pall of the surrounding darkness seemed to close thickly and densely round me. My eyes closed, and it seemed as if the roar and spray of the sea had swept over my head and that I was sinking into unfathomable depths.

* * * * *

How long that unconsciousness lasted I cannot tell. When I recovered it was to see Bella's anxious face bent over me, and to find myself in my own cabin. I felt strangely weak, and the chill and cold of the sea seemed still upon me. The fury of the storm still raged, I could hear the shrill whistle of the wind, the rattle of the shrouds, the hiss of the waves against the sides of the rocking vessel.

For a while I lay passively there trying to collect my

thoughts, and wondering whether it was day or night. Then suddenly memory returned. I sprang up and seized Bella's arm.

"Has the boat come back?" I cried impulsively.

"The boat," she said soothingly. "No, not yet, but of course it is quite safe. Do not distress yourself, the Laird knows the coast so well. He would have been sure to have put in somewhere when he saw the storm coming on."

I sank back on the pillow. "Not yet!" I echoed and the presentiment of evil that had once before oppressed me, came sweeping heavily over my senses again.

"It will never come back," I said drearily, "never—never—I feel it."

"Nonsense, Athole," exclaimed Bella. "Don't be getting that idea into your head. You mustn't expect it to return to-night. Probably they'll wait for daylight wherever they put in. Everyone says so. The sailors know what a good seaman your husband is. There really is no need to be anxious."

But her words failed utterly to convince me. I listened dumbly, stupidly; but all the time my heart grew heavier beneath its load of fear—all the time reproach and remorse were busy within me.

He might even now be lying cold and still under that wild fierce sea. And I had let him go to meet his death without a kind word or look, without an effort to win his confidence, or relieve the honest, faithful heart of its burden of suspicion.

The thought of death appalled me. Death in the best years of a good and useful manhood—in the midst of that careless jaunt, taken for the gratification of a fancy expressed by a pack of foolish girls. And this was the result!

It seemed horrible in its suddenness, and strange to say the horror seized me as something too absolutely certain for any argument to refute. Slowly, surely it settled upon my mind. Slowly, surely, it haunted the weary feverish hours of the long night. With the dawn I was in a high fever brought on by cold, exposure and the sudden shock and terror of those awful hours.

* * * * *

Long afterwards I heard the story of that dreadful

time. I was in a raging fever—they were all frightened, and resolved to run the yacht to the nearest harbour where I might be taken ashore and medical aid procured.

The morning broke fine and bright, and the wind was in our favour. One, two—three hours they waited for the missing boat. It never returned, and with every hour the delirium increased and the fever raged more wildly in my veins. They made for Tobermory again and here I was put ashore and the yacht returned to cruise about Loch Scavaig in hopes of hearing something of the boat or its unfortunate occupants. But the search and the waiting were futile—no sign, no word ever came—they could only suppose it had been swept out to sea and lost.

Enquiry was made at every point, but no boatman or fisherman had seen aught of it, nor was there any trace of its wreck, though coast and cavern and islands were searched for many a long day.

But of all this I knew nothing. Day followed day and week followed week. Bella and the two McKaye girls were the most careful and assiduous of nurses, but for all that it was long before the turning point was reached and I was pronounced out of danger. Then sadly, and by slow and wearisome stages, we returned to Corriemoor. Huel Penryth and the McKayes went to Inverness, but Bella accompanied me.

I found Mrs. Campbell quite broken down and prostrate under the blow that had so suddenly fallen. Donald was her pride, and prop, and stay. All her life and interests had centred in him so long that without him she seemed to lose strength of mind and body.

Inexpressibly dreary and mournful was the house, and every face seemed to carry something of the shadow of that recent loss. The fact of there being no direct heir was another misfortune, as now the estate would pass to some distant relative. Mrs. Campbell and I had, of course, an income for life, but Corriemoor itself was destined for strangers.

I heard all this in a dumb and passive way. Perhaps, if I had loved the place it would have been different, but I never had felt any keen or romantic attachment for my married home—nothing of the feeling I enter-

tained for Craig Bank. I made up my mind to return there and live with Grannie. Mrs. Campbell was going to a widowed sister in Perth, so I felt I could act with independence.

Three months after that ill-fated yachting expedition, I was once again in Inverness receiving Grannie's loving welcome, and almost ready to cheat myself into the belief that those intervening years had been but a dark and troubled dream, and that I was still only Athole Lindsay.

Almost—but the effort was not easy and not successful, for this was surely no girl's face that looked back at me from the little mirror of the familiar room, and no girl's heart beat now in that aching breast of womanhood which spoke of lessons learnt in pain, endured in silence, and whose fruits had yet to be gathered in.

CHAPTER II.

ALWAYS ALONE.

"Hush, call no echo up in further proof
Of desolation. There's a voice within
That weeps . . . as thou must sing
. . . Alone—aloof."

"WHEN are you going to be married, Bella?" I asked, one morning, as she and I were sitting in the little drawing-room at Craig Bank.

"Not till after Christmas," she said. "You see the McKays have a good deal of sight-seeing to get through yet, and Robert does not want to go back in the height of the Australian summer."

"I wonder how long you will remain out there?" I said, with a sigh. "I shall miss you terribly."

"Do you know what I've been thinking?" she said suddenly, as she let the work, on which her busy fingers had been engaged, fall idly on her lap. "I don't see why you shouldn't come out with us? There's nothing to keep you here, and your health is quite broken down. You are as white as a ghost, and as thin as a lath. It makes my heart ache to see you. I was asking Dr. Macgregor about you yesterday, and he told me you ought not to spend a winter here. The thing to set you up would be a sea-voyage."

I shivered. "Oh, no," I cried. "If you only knew how I hate the very sight and sound of the sea."

"That is because you are so weak and unnerved," said Bella soothingly. "I'm sure I don't wonder at it. But, dearie," she went on, putting her kind arm round me and drawing me close to her side, "you must try and get over this—this morbid feeling. I know what it is. You are always reproaching yourself—you think——"

"I will tell you what I think," I said passionately. "I think, Bella, that I was selfish and blind and inconsiderate. That I dealt pain to that good, kindly heart by a thousand words and looks and ways. That he *knew*—though he kept silence—why I had always been so cold and so indifferent. That he wanted me to be straightforward, and have confidence in him, and then he would have helped me, but I never understood that till too late, and then came that cruel death, and I can never tell him now, or beg him to forgive me. Oh, to think of it wrings my heart. The long, long, never-ending silence! And he was so good—he never reproached me, and I—I was always brooding and moaning over my own selfish sorrows. I never even thought he noticed or—or cared. But he did, Bella. Perhaps, too, in his own quiet way he suffered to the full as much as I did."

"I am quite sure of that," she said.

I looked up hastily—dashing the tears of weakness and helplessness from my eyes. "You knew?" I said. "Well, no doubt it was apparent enough to anyone but myself."

"It was very unfortunate," she said, as she smoothed the thick, disordered hair from my brow, and tried to school its rebellion under my widow's cap. "If Douglas Hay had not been with us I often think we should have got on better. The Laird never liked him, and I'm sure—I'm more than sure—he saw that he cared for you."

I was silent. I shared her conviction. I had been sure of it also from that night when Donald and I had been so near confidence—yet, not near enough to seize the opportunity.

"But of what use to fret now?" Bella resumed. "How often you have said that life is full of mistakes, and we make our own sufferings by our own follies."

"That is true," I said mournfully. "Bella, I am not very old yet, but it seems to me, when I look back, that I have lived a lifetime of misery and self-reproach. Perfect confidence is the key-stone of married peace—without it there will always be coldness, estrangement, mistrust. I married Donald Campbell with a secret in my heart—and only now, when it is too late, I seem to recognize that I might have trusted him to the full, and that he would have been wise enough to understand and not condemn—and—and loving enough to pardon."

"I am glad," said Bella, "you do him justice at last. But, dear Athole, do not let this morbid regret spoil your future. You are so young still, and you may have a long and happy life before you. If—if Douglas loves you still—and I am more than sure he does—what is to prevent your marrying him now?"

The blood flew in a sudden flush of shame to my face.

"Oh, hush," I cried entreatingly. "How can I make you understand? I know Douglas loves me—I know he never ceased to love me through those silent years that divided us—but if I went to him, if I listened now, it would always seem as if that dead man's voice sounded in my ears with endless reproach—as if his face looked back at me, as—as I have seen it look in a hundred delirious fancies when the waves tossed it up to the grey skies as if in sport and derision. He thought of me when he was drowning in that wild sea—thought of me—called for me—I know it so well, and in all the years to come I feel as if I could never shut out that memory—or silence that voice."

"But, my dear, this is only a morbid fancy as I have said before—born of weakness and sorrow, and the long strain in heart and nerves."

I shook my head.

"You don't understand me, Bella. Indeed I often think I don't understand myself. There is a wide difference between our two natures, and undoubtedly yours is the happier. Sometimes I wonder what makes the difference between us. I suppose it is circumstance. *Had I been in your place—* But, there, what folly to *talk like that.* We are as we are. No one asks us if we *desire to be born.* No one seems to care whether our

surroundings are suitable to our nature. Helplessly and without choice we are flung into a groove of life—be it a dungeon, a torture chamber, or a palace of delight and luxury and love. What can we do? Nothing—nothing—nothing, though we beat chained hands against our prison bars, or shriek out in agony of soul in the torture-chamber, or revel discontentedly amidst the flowers and sweets and luxuries of our palace chamber—we shall not alter them nor change them. For Fate binds us by a thousand threads—frail to all seeming—but strong when united as iron bands are strong. You are saying to yourself, now, that I am free once more—free to dream my dream of love, free to look forward to the happiness which once seemed so near and so beautiful. But I know better, Bella. I am not free, and what I fancied was happiness proved only a myth. There is no reality in the dream of my youth, nor is it able to content me any longer. I want something deeper and stronger, and more satisfying. Love to me now is no girl's fancy, that accepts without questioning. It is something deep, searching, far-reaching, passionately jealous and exacting. It is a feeling Douglas could not understand, and could not satisfy, and . . . and I could not bear to test it again, and know I must endure another failure. So—though you may think me free, Bella—I, in my heart, know I am not, and I will never run the risk of another marriage.”

Bella looked at me with puzzled eyes.

“I confess,” she said, “I am a long way from understanding you. You were always a fantastical wee body, but what pleasure it can give you to deny yourself what you once craved, and all for sake of ‘ideas,’ I cannot imagine. It is as if you lived life for sake of dreams, and when you woke up imagined they were more real than the realities.”

“Perhaps they are,” I said, “to me. Oh, Bella, life is a terrible thing when we think of it. Sometimes I have thought I shall go mad with all the doubts and fears and terrors of it, and no one, nothing, gives me rest. And I look out on it all sometimes and wonder why we endure, and why we bear, goaded like dumb beasts by a task-master we cannot see, we cannot reproach, we cannot ever reach. Oh, it is no use

looking shocked! I must speak; if you only knew how I suffered in all that terrible time of fever! How in those long, long hours one thought after another would chase itself through my brain, and all the hateful cruelty and horror of life, and the hypocrisy and folly and sin that load it and are perpetually seeking and securing fresh victims, would live out for me their histories past and present! I wonder I did not go mad. . . .”

Sobs burst from me, tearing my breast with suffocating pain. Bella, scared and white, in vain endeavoured to quiet me. How could I explain, how could I make her or anyone else understand through what a phase of feeling I had lived and struggled for many and many a weary month?

The hopelessness of it perhaps calmed me more than her soothing words—the words with which one pacifies a grieved and sorrowful child.

Alas! is it not one of the saddest and cruellest of life's many cruelties that our deepest thoughts meet no answering comprehension—our deepest cry finds never an echo? We must suffer alone; always—always alone. Whatever we think—whatever we doubt—whatever we feel, our own nearest and dearest seem the last to understand us—the last to follow us down to those depths from whence we call for aid, or sympathy.

We are foolish, they say, or wicked, or morbid—something, anything, but what is right and safe and rational, and so we take our sorrows and our questioning into silence once again, and weep and weep and break our hearts or not, according as our strength may be, but we are alone—always—always alone!

“And now,” I said to Bella after that long pause of silence, “you see why I cannot go to Australia. It would look—oh, you must see how strange it would look. Huel Penryth and—and *he*, are going out in the same vessel as the McKays. How could I go also? it is impossible. Even if it were really necessary, I could not do it, but I am sure it is not. I am well enough.”

She looked at me very sadly as she resumed her work.

“You may be well,” she said, “but you certainly don't look so. However, I know of old how determined

you are when you have once made up your mind. Perhaps," she added with the nearest approach to sarcasm of which she was capable, "you have argued yourself into a belief that there is something meritorious in killing yourself by inches, as you certainly are doing."

"No, Bella," I said with a faint smile, "I have no particular desire to do that."

"It's just sheer perversity," she said crossly; "I shall set Kenneth on to argue with you. He always succeeds in making people do what he wishes."

"Kenneth!" I exclaimed, "is he home? I thought he was in Edinburgh."

"We expect him to-night," she said. "I suppose you'll not be forbidding him to come and see you, my wee leddy?"

"No, I shall be very glad to see him again," I answered. "It is a very long time since we met. He never would come to Corriemoor."

"Perhaps," said Bella dryly, "he had reasons. Kenneth is very stiff in the matter of opinions, and once he makes up his mind it's no easy work to alter it. I'm not sorry Douglas Hay is away in Cornwall. They never agreed, and I'm more than sure Kenneth would not have cared to see him hanging about here."

"I really don't see why it should matter to Kenneth," I said with some indignation.

"Don't you?" said Bella coolly, "that's because you keep your eyes very wilfully closed, little coz. But there's no need to say more, Kenneth can bide his time, and I've no doubt he will."

I was silent for a moment. Her words distressed and displeased me beyond measure, but I knew she could not understand why they did so, any more than she could follow out the train of reasoning which to her seemed only morbid and gloomy.

For I had spoken but the simple honest truth when I had said I would not accept Douglas Hay's love were he again to proffer it. Yet I could not explain what had so altered and revolutionized my feelings. Only love seemed dead within me—dead with the kindly heart that I had never valued, and which for sake of whim of mine had found death in those wild western seas.

How small and poor and insignificant a thing my own

life looked beside that honest, unselfish, useful one of the Laird of Corriemoor. And that whole trip had been planned and carried out for my pleasure, and now what was the result? He had gone beyond the reach of my cry for forgiveness, my penitence and remorse.

Was it possible then that I should step to happiness over his dead body, that I should stretch out my hand to accept love and tenderness, and cheat myself into the belief that I was free to do so? I could not. Conscience, heart, mind, all seemed to rebel against such an action, and yet the time was not so far removed when I had deemed it possible, when I had acknowledged that love still lived and burned in my aching heart, and that I could suffer still.

But now? Well, now I only knew that ice itself could not have been more cold than were my thoughts of Douglas Hay. All the fevered longings, the passionate desires, the dreams of those dead days had perished utterly, and that at the very time when one would have expected them to remain and live, nourished by fresh hopes, strengthened by new promises—a vision as glad and glorious as when my youth had gazed upon it through happy tears of promised joy.

My youth—but that was far away, and so was the love that it had believed in. And I knew so well—so well, that if I took back that love, and tried to content myself with it and to cheat my mind into accepting it, I should only wake to the knowledge of another failure.

I shuddered as I thought of the disenchantment and disillusion of marriage. I was no longer a girl, to whom dreams and ideals meant all. And I felt I dared not risk a second venture, dared not trust the light nature, swayed by passionate impulse, wavering ever in the balance—the nature I had clothed in virtues of my own imagining, but now recognized as being utterly unable to give me what I desired.

If I had married him in the first instance, I might never have awakened, I might have been blindly satisfied to my life's end. After all, he loved me, and what better thing can one desire than love, in this hard, unpitiful world? Yet now I knew that love alone would never satisfy me, and I could not tell him why. It would only hurt his pride, it could not alter his nature.

If I said that I had set myself to analyze this madness for sake of which we had both suffered and then gave him the result of such analysis, would that convince him?

Could I say "I love you, but I know that if I married you I should be desperately unhappy, that your soul could not answer to my soul, your nature come into touch with that higher part of mine which is ever seeking, asking, desiring?" If I said that this knowledge, and this feeling came to me suddenly, without desire of mine, and took possession of my heart and showed me that that heart had ceased to love him with the old, blind adoring worship, what would he say—and how much would he understand?

A man's passion is so stormy and impetuous a thing while it lasts, sweeping away obstacles and impediments, bent on working its own will in its own way.

"Give me this day, this hour," he says. "Let the future take its chance." And for the sake of that day and that hour one sees one's whole life wrecked.

I would have seized that day once and with blind eyes and beating heart have taken its exceeding rapture as a divine gift, believing in a continuance that now I knew had no existence. Once—but that was surely long ago, a lifetime ago.

My eyes fell on my hands clasped together on that black mourning robe which, after all, was less a mockery than I should once have deemed it.

It had the sombre hue my own life would wear, the dull and cheerless tint of all the colourless days to come. How thin and white my hands looked resting there, how loosely the gold circlet fitted my finger now.

The sight and touch of it recalled my wandering thoughts. A wave of sorrowful memories swept over my heart.

"I have spoilt one life" I said to myself as I touched that small gold symbol of so many regrets, such wasted hours, such bitter longings. "But I will never willingly spoil another. He will misjudge me. He will think, perhaps, I am acting out of vanity, folly, revenge, but I must accept that. After all, will it matter so very much? My life is not of so great a value, and it must learn patience and endurance, even as it has learnt suffering."

CHAPTER III.

A NATURE—AND A NATURE.

"Our acts our angels are;
 Or good or ill,
 Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.
 * * *

All things that are
 Made for our general uses are at war.
 Even we among ourselves."

I suppose it is habit that makes me still enter these daily records of my somewhat uneventful life.

Often and often have I resolved to close these pages, and say no more, but in some hour of weakness or longing I have broken the resolve and poured out the stream of restless thoughts to the safe and silent pages that have so long been my confidant.

A time of peace and quiet has come to me. In Grannie's home no one disturbs or intrudes. I am at once that object of interest and sympathy and speculation, "a young widow." But I am intensely thankful for the peace and the rest, and the tender love of the sweetest, kindest soul that ever God created.

How I envy her her simple faith, her perfect, untroubled trust. Her serene content in all that has been, or may be. The sands of life are running low, but she has no fear. Calmly, placidly, as a child, she sits in the old accustomed chair by the fire-side, each day growing more feeble and more frail, each day finding it more difficult to come down stairs, each day shortening the time for that stay in the homely little parlour, to which I look forward so anxiously.

But with the chill breath of the failing year, I note a change. It is scarcely possible that Christmas will find her in our midst, and she has gently and urgently tried to hasten Bella's marriage, which she wishes to take place here, like my own. The McKayes are in Inverness again, and there really seems no reason to delay the event, so Bella finally consents, and the first of December is fixed for the wedding.

Huel Penryth and Douglas Hay are still in Cornwall,

but Robert McKaye has expressed a wish for their presence as his only guests. It is to be a very quiet wedding.

Only the two families are to be present, with the exception of Douglas and his friend.

And for the first time since that passionate parting by the loch side I am to meet Douglas Hay again. As I say this to myself, as I write it down in plain words as a plain fact, I wonder how I can be so calm and so cold.

No thrill of pulse, no leap of heart at the thought of meeting him, and yet, once, how dearly I loved him. But I could not recall that time. I could not feel the old, passionate emotion.

I only sit here by the fire, gazing at the pale, sad reflection of myself, and saying in my heart, "I am so tired." I seem to have grown so hard and cold. Behind me are regrets—before me, hopelessness. I am weary of life and all its vanity.

* * * * *

It is the night before Bella's wedding and she is staying here at Craig Bank at Grannie's request. The marriage will take place at mid-day to-morrow—that simple, unceremonious form which had seemed so strange to me.

Bella would have no wedding finery. A plain grey silk dress and a simple grey velvet bonnet—that is all. She will go away directly after the ceremony, and after spending a week in Edinburgh and another in London, she and her husband are coming back to Inverness. Early in February they are all to set sail for Australia, and she has left the business of her outfit until her return here.

We have both been sitting by the fire discussing these matters. On the bed beyond lie the gown and bonnet as they arrived from the dressmaker's, and beside them, the long, rich, seal-skin coat which the bridegroom has presented to her for travelling.

I thought she looked very grave and anxious as I watched her, but I am sure she is happy—with that contented quiet happiness which is all-sufficient to her nature.

"He is a good man, and he will be very good to me," *she had said*, as she knelt there in the firelight, her

long dark hair falling over her shoulders and taking rich reflections from the flames. "And I am so fond of the girls; after having a houseful of brothers and sisters I should miss them terribly. I like young folk about me."

"How I shall miss you," I said suddenly. "It won't be the same place at all without you, Bella. I never had a sister, as you know, and you seem to have just stood in place of one ever since I came here."

"Do you remember that time?" she asked somewhat wistfully. "What a white, frail little creature you were—not that you look very much better now," she added, glancing up at my face. "Oh, my dear, I wish—I wish you would listen to reason and come out with me to the Colony. Doctor Macgregor is always urging it. Of course, now he won't say much, because of Grannie, but, dearie, we all know that the end is not so very far off for her, and then what will you do? You can't live on here by yourself, and you wouldn't care to bide with Mrs. Campbell—you never got on well with her. I'll be very dreary and lonely for you; your own folk seem not to want you either."

"I often think," I said, "that I am not the sort of person anyone wants. Why should they? I am not bright, or cheerful, or accomplished, or pretty. We were talking of grooves the other day, Bella, but I seem to fit very badly into mine. It is people like yourself who make the world brighter and better, not dreamers such as I am."

"But have you no plan, no wish for the future?"

I shook my head.

"No, I care for no one so much as for Grannie and you, and I am going to lose you both. After that——"

"But, Athole, this is more than foolish. You have just let yourself get into a weak, morbid state of health and your mind is suffering for it. I must tell Doctor Macgregor to speak seriously to you. For myself, I confess I cannot understand what has changed you so. You are quite different ever since we went on that yachting expedition. Sometimes I am sorry we ever did——"

"So am I," I answered readily. "And Donald told me he planned it for me and for my pleasure, because

he thought I was so dull at Corriemoor. Poor fellow, what a return for his thoughtfulness and self-sacrifice he met with!"

"Do you know, Athole," said Bella suddenly, "that you always say 'Donald' now, never 'the Laird.' Yet, when he was alive, you would never call him by his name. I often thought he didn't like it."

"I suppose one always amends one's mistakes too late," I said drearily. "If I had only known sooner that he cared, that he thought of me and loved me as he did, I might have been a happier wife and a better one, but I thought he was disappointed with me and I seemed in the wrong place altogether, and Mrs. Campbell always told him I was useless and idle and foolish, and I supposed he agreed with her. So we drifted apart and I never dreamt or suspected he cared what I did, or how I suffered till—till that night on Loch Scavaig when he spoke to me. He seemed so sorry then that he had married me—and—well it was all so hopeless. Oh, Bella," I cried in sudden terror, "if you only knew how his death haunts me. He—he might have gone out reckless and careless of the storm, and that too was to gratify a whim of mine. Do you think," I continued earnestly, "that he ever guessed about Douglas Hay?"

"I am afraid so," said Bella gravely.

I was silent for a time; my thoughts flew back again to that night on the yacht, to that sudden pitiful murmur "Poor lassie," which had fallen from Donald's lips, conveying so much to me, revealing so much in him.

* * * * *

Bella broke the silence at last.

"Have you thought, Athole," she said, "how you are going to meet Douglas Hay to-morrow?"

Involuntarily I glanced at my heavy mourning dress.

"He will surely know that silence is best," I said.

"He has not written conventional sympathy. I have had no word or sign from him since we parted. I—I had almost hoped he would not come here to-morrow, but I suppose it would have looked strange."

"Robert is very fond of him," said Bella, twisting her rings round and round her plump white finger. "I think I ought to tell you, Athole, that he would like him to marry Jessie; he has said so again and again to me."

"Why should he not?" I said slowly, "she would make an excellent wife."

"Of course, Robert's idea is to retire from this sheep-farming, or whatever they call it," continued Bella, "and settle Douglas and Jessie there at his station."

"The plan is admirable," I said, "but what do the chief people concerned in it say to the arrangement?"

"Of course he has not spoken of it yet, to either of them. I advised him not. To tell you the truth, Athole, I always expected you would marry Douglas after—well, after a year or so. I cannot for the life of me understand what has changed you. You were so madly in love with him—and yet now——"

"That one little word—and what a difference it makes," I said. "Now. Don't physiologists say we undergo a total change every seven years? Perhaps I am terminating one of these periods; as far as age goes, I suppose I am. Seven—fourteen—twenty-one. Naturally, as every particle and atom of me has changed since I was fourteen, I cannot be the same—mentally or physically——"

"Now, Athole," she entreated, "if you are off on your cantrips——"

"But hear me out," I pleaded. "Why should you—or—or anyone blame me for a change that I cannot help—that I did not desire—and most assuredly could not have effected by will or effort, otherwise I could have been a happier woman, Bella? Being different, the same feelings and desires and promises cannot bind me; they bind a different person—a something that has escaped and left me. I may have been a fool some years ago—I find I am a fool no longer. It is like waking from a dream—a spell. One feels free, but cannot explain from whence the freedom came, or what will be its results. Now that is exactly how I feel; I stand on ground that is firm—I can be cold and critical, instead of blind and impassioned. Am I to be pitied or blamed or congratulated—or is it only the change effected by the physiological theory?"

"I am inclined to think you are 'daft,'" said Bella laughing. "Did one ever hear such nonsense? I wish you had had a bairn or two to give you a natural interest in life and bring you down to the cares and duties of

motherhood; I'm sure that is the best thing for a woman. It is what nature meant her for, and she is safer and wiser and happier with a child in her arms and at her knee, than with all the learning and wisdom and philosophy of—of the Queen of Sheba."

I looked somewhat wistfully at the leaping flames and their many fantastic shapes.

Was she right? Had she hit upon a truth in the downright honest fashion of good sense? Were sentiment and imagination only a mistake—a fitting vesture for youth and the follies that youth is bound to indulge and suffer for? I pushed the thought aside with some impatience.

"I am not that sort of woman, Bella," I said, "I should not have been a good mother. I have always thought so. When I knew my little child was dead almost in its first hours of life, I think I was more glad than sorry. The world is so cruel; I—I hated to think that another life would suffer—sin—regret—as—as I myself had done. I did not even cry when they took it away and I knew I should never see it smile or call me 'Mother.' I said to myself, 'It will never do harm to anyone—it will know no heartbreak or sin.' And the all thought I was cold and unfeeling because I did not cry."

"Oh, Athole—don't talk like that! You break my very heart."

I saw the big bright drops gather in her eyes and fall on her crimson wrapper. I sat on, dry-eyed and passive. The time had gone by for ever when tears were easy—or a relief.

"Do not cry," I entreated; "it is no use—no use. The tears of the world are many as its rivers, but they have not stayed one sorrow—nor staved off one hour of misery. And listen!—the clock is striking midnight. Bella, it is your wedding-day!"

CHAPTER IV.

A CRY TO THE SILENCE.

"A year divides us, love from love,
 Though you love now, though I loved then;
 The gulf is strait, but deep enough,
 Who shall recross?—who among men
 Shall cross again?"

1ST December—midnight.

It is all over now. The house is quiet—the guests are gone. I have helped Jean to put away the best glass and silver, and seen Grannie to bed and read and talked to her till she fell asleep, and now I am alone at last.

Alone, to think of that meeting with Douglas Hay which, to Bella, had seemed such an ordeal—yet it had been a very simple matter.

I was standing by Grannie's side when he and Huel Penryth entered the room. The McKayes and Camerons were already there, and old Mr. Gillespie, who was to marry Bella. One quick flash from the blue eyes—a sudden paling of the cheeks as glance met glance—then the quiet, formal greeting of conventionality—that was all.

Huel Penryth lingered beside me for a moment. No doubt I looked a mournful object in my sombre widow's dress and cap. Even Grannie had hinted that I might lay aside the latter appendage for that day at least, but I had refused. Why should I make any difference? Bella was no stranger, and if she did not object to my appearance, no one else had any right to do so. I listened quietly to Huel Penryth's kindly sympathy and his grieved comment on my changed looks. Douglas was standing by pretty, blushing Jessie McKaye, whose eager welcome had been flattering enough to show that she, at least, was glad of his return.

I answered Huel almost coldly. Did he think what Bella had thought? Was he speculating in his own mind as to the value of those external symbols of woe?

In all probability he was—and that suspicion made me cold and stiff and formal, as I would not otherwise have been.

Ah, well—it is all over now, and I am free to put my

thoughts down as I please, and analyse myself and my feelings as microscopically as my fancy inclines.

* * * * *

I have sat here staring at this blank page for a long, long time. Somehow it is not easy to write down the thoughts that throng and surge in my brain. Bella's marriage has so vividly brought back the memory of my own that I seem to be living over again that time of misery and disillusion which led to it.

Perhaps this memory has added bitterness to my thoughts of Douglas Hay. I tell myself how much happier—safer—better—my life would have been but for him.

Yet after all I may be unjust. Am I not rather the ingenious architect of my own misfortunes?

I raised a false idol, and blindly worshipped at its shrine, and, even when I knew it false, refused to believe in a worthier love and a truer happiness.

Why I only recognise this fact now—now, when it is too late for remedy or atonement, I cannot understand. But I know that it is the case.

I wonder whether Douglas Hay will call here to-morrow to see me?

Some instinct tells me that he will, though he has said nothing to that effect. Does he remember our last meeting, his wild words and my indignation? Did he believe in that indignation, I wonder? Could he even dimly imagine the revulsion of feeling, the sudden change in mind, heart, nature, that his wild words and sudden stormy passion had wrought in me? Probably not. Of all that had happened since—my illness, grief remorse—he was quite ignorant.

And my manner at our meeting to-day could have afforded no clue to such a change.

He had said no word, given no glance that betrayed on his part either meaning or intention, yet some subtle undercurrent of suspicion was at work in my mind, and I knew that we were not destined to part without some sort of explanation.

* * * * *

With a sigh I turn over the pages of my journal. Among them I see that diary which Douglas Hay had left for me on the evening of his abrupt departure. It fits *into that portion of my own story which ended so abruptly.*

I glance at the bold, clear handwriting. I read again those scenes of peril and adventure. It seems strange that any memory of me should have lingered through that time and filled his thoughts.

How strange men are. Does a woman ever quite understand them, or they, on their side, ever quite understand us? Certainly not so long as we love and idealize each other. Only when life has brought us calm and dispassionate judgment and the scales fall from our eyes, we recognize that even in a faulty human being there may be great and noble qualities, and that in an almost heroic nature may exist serious blemishes and sins, that are so near to vice that almost one wonders they never actually passed the border line.

And now I will close the book and try to sleep. I wonder as I do so what record will be entered here of to-morrow.

* * * * *

Alas! Alas! Is it not always the unexpected that happens? For many a long and weary day my pen has lain idle. No entry of that expected "to-morrow" set itself on the blank, white page.

For, in the dawn, a hasty summons brought me to Grannie's side, and one look at her face told even my inexperienced eyes that a great and sudden change was there.

Yet there was nothing painful or terrifying about that gradual and peaceful departure. Quietly as one sinks to sleep after long toil and weariness, so she folded her tired hands and closed her eyes on things of earth for ever.

Some of the Camerons were there — I hardly remember who—and old Jean and I. To the end she seemed to know my touch and voice, to feel the pressure of my hand, as hers grew colder and colder, in that other unseen grasp which now had rivalled mine.

"As ye live, so shall ye die."

Well, Grannie died calmly, sweetly, painlessly, and I sat there and watched and waited till I knew that all was over, and I could only envy her that quiet rest beyond the closed portals of her sweet and gentle life.

For now it seemed to me that indeed I was alone. . . utterly alone, since she had left me. And, as I went to my own little room, and drew down the blinds, to shut

out the intrusive light, I thought of the day when I had first come there, of the morning when I had opened my eyes to the dancing sunbeams, and seen the sweet kind face, so anxious and so loving, bend over me as she bade me drink the cup of milk in her hand.

It seemed such a little thing, and yet the memory touched me as few others could do.

I threw myself on the bed in a storm of passionate grief. Not for any sorrow or loss had I wept as I wept then.

Surely I had never loved her enough, never valued her enough, never been half considerate or thoughtful enough of her while still she was here beside me. And now my voice could not reach her, my tears could not trouble her, she who always dreaded to see me cry. Oh, to have her back again even for one moment, to beg her to forgive me if I had been selfish, tiresome, inconsiderate, in that brief space of time we had spent together.

How little she had ever seemed to consider herself. How pleased she had been that I should enjoy my life and have anything or everything that might amuse or please me. Oh, Grannie! Grannie!

* * * * *

And now it is all over. The dark hours and days in the little lonely house, the dreary preparations, the funeral in the quaint, beautiful burying ground of *Tom-na-Hurich* And I am alone here, with old Jean, for Grannie has left the house and furniture and everything she possessed to me. I was astonished when they told me, but I recognize now the kindly love and thought that gave to me the house where I had been happier than in any place my life had known.

I have money enough to keep it up, and so I resolve to remain here.

Bella has not yet come back.

They have not told her of what has happened, not liking to darken the early days of her wedded life with the shadow of death.

* * * * *

Dec. 8th. Old Jean has just been in, for what she calls "a bit gossip." She tells me that old David Hay, Douglas Hay's father, is dead. He died last night. Well,

Douglas will be richer than ever now. I wonder whether he will go out to Australia, or remain in Inverness?

How strange that I should care nothing now for what he does, that he seems to stand so far away from my life, and all concerning it.

He cannot be grieved at his father's death. They never were good friends, and the old man treated him very badly. Still, it is strange that we should both be mourners almost at the same time.

* * * * *

DEC. 12th. A dreary, melancholy day. The snow has been falling ever since daybreak. I hear that old David Hay was buried to-day. Not at *Tom-na-Hurich*, but in the old Kirk-yard at Inverness, where lies that young, unhappy wife, whose heart he broke by coldness and neglect.

I ask no questions as to Douglas Hay's intention, or movements. I have a vague feeling that he will write or come to me soon. I hope with all my heart that he is not going to stay in the town.

* * * * *

A summons from old Jean. I am wanted in the parlour. A visitor.

"Who is it, Jean?" I ask.

"It's Mr. Hay. He was no sure that you'd see him, mem, but he just bade me to enquire."

For a moment I hesitate—only a moment. Then I say quietly, "Yes, Jean, I will come down."

CHAPTER V.

"KILLED—OR CURED?"

"I have put my days and dreams out of mind,
Days that are over—dreams that are done,
Though we seek life through, we shall surely find
There is none of them clear to us now—not one."

* * * * *

"Back, ah, come back! Ah, well away,
But my lover comes not any day."

* * * * *

THE little parlour looked dusky and cold in the dying firelight. Evidently Jean had thought I was not coming downstairs again that evening. She had lit the candles on the mantelpiece, and their dim light fell on the dark figure standing there, and gazing intently into the dull and flickering flame.

At the sound of my step he turned and looked at me. I saw his face was very white. All the gay and debonnair youth of it was changed and saddened. His eyes had a sleepless, haggard look, as of suffering endured untill repression avenges itself.

"You—you wished to see me?" I said, pausing a few yards off from where he stood. I did not offer to shake hands—what use to be conventional or formal now? Did I not know full well what he had come to say? Did I not know equally well what my answer would be?

"Yes," he said, and he moved a step or two nearer. "But won't you shake hands? Are you still unfor-giving?"

I extended my hand mechanically, and then seated myself on the chair he drew forward.

"I—I hope you believe me when I say how sorry I have felt for you in all this time of trouble," he said, with hesitation. "Words don't count for much, and— and somehow I could not write. I thought perhaps you would see me if I called. It is very good of you."

"It is not good at all," I said brusquely. "I knew it would have to happen sooner or later."

"You say that as if you wished to—to get it over—like an unpleasant duty. Are you still angry with me, Athole?"

The reproach in voice and look irritated me.

"Why should I be—angry?" I said. "I only wish to hear why you wanted to see me—why you are here?"

"I will soon tell you that," he said, very quietly. "You—you are, of course, aware that my father's death has made me a comparatively rich man. There is no necessity now for me to lead a wandering life or to be anything but a 'respectable citizen.' I think, however, I owe it to myself and to you, Athole, to be perfectly frank. I—I spoilt your life in the past. Let me atone for it in the future. We are still young. Freedom has come to you—prosperity to me. Let us forget all this dark and miserable time, and be happy as—as once we dreamt we should be happy. I know it is very soon to speak—but there are circumstances which make conventionality seem a very poor thing. I want you to forgive me, Athole—to take me back. You can't have forgotten

—you can't have changed. Good God! why do you look at me like that?"

"I may not have forgotten," I said coldly, "but I have—changed."

He drew back a step. He looked at me with flaming eyes, angry, incredulous.

"I—I don't believe it," he said passionately. "You are trying to deceive yourself and me. You think you owe it to your husband's memory to appear shocked at—at my speaking so soon. Do you think I cannot read you better—that I did not study every detail of your life—that I could not see how dreary it was, how unsuitable?"

The grain of truth in his words stung me to the quick. I felt the blood leap in angry force to my face.

"Was it for that reason you came on the yacht at my husband's request?" I cried stormily. "To spy out my life and my surroundings, while accepting a hospitality you now abuse? It is on a par with most of your actions!"

He grew very white. "Athole, you know me better than that!" he said.

"I only know that but for you my life would have been safe and happy, sheltered by a good man's love and devotion. I only know that I pained and saddened his life every hour. I showed it by my blind and wilful selfishness. I only know that for my sake he went to his death. I only know that always, always his voice is ringing in my ears out of that cruel sea. I only know that of all the mistakes in my miserable mistaken life, I regret none so much as the mistake I made in loving you—or—or thinking I loved you, and so wilfully blinding myself to a worthier and a better love!"

"That is enough," he said, as he drew back and stood looking at me with white face and burning eyes. My voice had suddenly broken; a choking sob cut short the torrent of passionate words. "Did I not say, when first I knew you," he went on, "when we took our very first walk, that a woman's promises were like the clouds—drifting, unstable? She only *thinks* she loves, and when a man believes her, he finds it is some 'passing fancy' she has dignified by that name. If—if you had really cared, you could not have changed—you *could not!*"

His voice was low and fierce, his eyes burned darkly in the whiteness of his face.

I sat there—my hands clasped, the great tears falling on my black dress. But neither his passion nor his wrath moved me. My heart seemed dead to any appeal or any plea of his.

Suddenly he threw himself down before me, clasping my hands and raining kisses on them, between his broken words.

"Oh, Athole, Athole, listen! It can't be true that you have ceased to care—that you have forgotten all that used to be. It is not so very long ago, and God knows if I wronged you then I have suffered enough for it. What has changed you? This cold, hard woman is not my little, gentle love of long ago—who was so pitiful, and so kind, and so forgiving."

I looked at him—kneeling there, humbled, pleading, despairing.

Once it would have been my sweetest "revenge." But now I only felt a great sorrow and a great pity—yet neither stirred one pulse of the old love, or broke down that cold, strange barrier which Death and Remorse had raised between us.

"Douglas," I said—more gently than I had yet spoken—"I cannot, even to myself, explain what has changed me, but I am changed, utterly and entirely. Once love seemed to me everything, and I gave myself up to it without a thought or regret. Oh, how I loved you then, Douglas. I had no thought or wish or desire that was not of you or with you—there was nothing you might have asked that I would not have done . . . Think how you repaid me. One cannot go back—one cannot live twice through such a time as that. The first repayment of my love for you was faithlessness, the second—insult. Then it seemed to me I had only been worshipping a false idol—that even if I could believe, if I *could* care, in the old, blind, trusting way—I should only wake to fresh disappointment and fresh sorrow. I wanted a love, great and strong and unselfish, to lift me to higher things, not let me fall to lower. You taught me distrust. Is it such a wonderful thing that I should have changed—that I should look out on life with eyes of *suspicion and of fear*? You blame me very harshly—

cannot you understand that this change was not brought about by any wish or will of mine. I—I cannot, even to myself, explain it. But it is here—like lead or ice about my heart. I feel as if nothing could ever soften or subdue me again."

There were no tears in my eyes now. But I felt the hot scorch of his as they fell on my clasped hands.

"I think," he said at last, "that you wrong yourself. This is only a feeling born of grief and regret and trouble. Your nature is not cold and your heart is not hard. You were right to blame me for—for my madness—for what you justly call an insult—but surely you might understand a man's feelings are not always under his control, and I had suffered horribly all that time on the yacht when I kept aloof from you, and schooled myself every day to treat you as if—as if you were no more to me than the others. I know I should not speak like this now, it must seem presumptuous and ill-judged, but in a way I am forced to it. Penryth is going back to Australia at once, and he wishes me to go with him. I have good reason now for refusal, but I had determined to speak to you first. I could not make any plans or leave this country without saying what was in my heart, without asking for some hope, however small. I would be patient enough now, Athole."

I drew my hands coldly away. "I have no hope to give you, Douglas. I do not say it from any pretence of propriety or prudery. You, I think, know me better than that. It is the simple truth, I—I do not love you any longer."

The truth was out at last. The strange inexplicable truth that had haunted me for so long now, defying me to contradict it or its accusation of faithlessness on my past. He listened, then dropped my hands and rose slowly to his feet.

"I am to understand," he said hoarsely, "that all is at an end, that you never wish to see me, that I am to consider myself dismissed—for ever?"

"You put it very harshly," I said. "But I suppose that is what it amounts to."

"You are not saying this out of any foolish revenge, any jealousy of—of that old folly about another woman?"

"If you mean Mrs. Dunleith, you forget that I know her real character—it was in your journal. I have neither jealousy nor fear of her, nor any desire to be revenged for what she once made me suffer."

"Then this change is real, or, I am to suppose I am supplanted. There is Kenneth——"

"Do not insult me," I said coldly. "I have given you an explanation, a perfectly true one. You are at liberty to believe it or not. Be very sure of this, that widowhood is to me a sorrowful reality, and its sorrow is all the greater because of the regret and remorse that must for ever embitter its memory. Have I said enough?"

"Quite enough," he said, his voice cold and hard, his eyes alone betraying the wounded pride and fierce anger he sought to control. "Your sentiments are a credit to your position. I wonder which will last the longest."

I rose abruptly. "We need not discuss that point, I did not expect you would understand—it must seem strange, but I have only spoken the truth of my feelings."

"I know you were always particularly candid."

"If I said I was sorry you would not believe me, and I cannot be hypocritical and offer you friendship or—or talk of a future when we shall meet and can afford to laugh at all this as a long dead folly. I almost hope, Douglas, that we never shall meet again on this side of eternity."

"Will nothing move you?" he cried, barring my way to the door as I turned in that direction. "Have you considered what this means to both of us? If you send me from you now I swear I will never come back—never ask what I have asked to-day—never give you the satisfaction of knowing you can make a man suffer to gratify what I believe is, after all, your own wounded vanity, or your desire to revenge on me the pain you say I once caused you."

"It is only natural," I said, "that you should misjudge me. But you may believe I am speaking the simple truth. I am not acting out of revenge—it would be a base and foolish thing to do; and much as I have suffered at your hands, Douglas, I would not, if I could, deal you

back one pang, one tear, one regret of all the many you cost me. Once I might have wished you to suffer, but not now."

"Then it is only that you have ceased to love me?"

"That," I said, "is the simple truth. I cannot explain it, but I feel it. No doubt it sounds strange; I think it must; but it is the truth and it is best you should know it."

"I—I suppose," he said turning away, "I am rightly served. All my life I have been heedless, selfish, inconstant, taking what pleasure came in my way, careless of suffering caused to others. Still it is very hard."

"I am very sorry," I said more gently. "But I think all feeling and sentiment of that sort died out of me when—when I woke from that terrible time of fever and learnt my loss, and seemed to recognize my long selfishness and blindness. When once one recognizes a change like that, there is no possible resurrection, one seems to drift apart in the spirit as in the flesh. The word 'together' has lost all its magic."

"You analyse your feelings as mercilessly as a vivisectionist would a victim," he said bitterly. "I am glad to leave you in so comfortable a frame of mind. Life will soon resume interest for you. It is only the heart whose love has outlived hope that knows what real loneliness is."

The dull fire had died out, the little parlour looked cheerless and gloomy. I shivered as with sudden cold. His words echoed mournfully in my ears—I, whose life was so lonely and so empty now.

But it had to be. I could not recall the past, could not pretend to live in its memories, and be glad as once I had been glad.

I stretched out my hands to him. "Forgive me, Douglas, and say good-bye. Believe me it is better you should know the truth even if—if it pains you—than wake to disillusion and regret."

He took my hands in both his own. The anger died out of his face, leaving it very sad and very white.

"Perhaps," he said, "you hardly know how cruel you are, but why should I blame you? another woman would not have spoken so truthfully. You must be very sure of yourself to have done so, for, as truly as there is a

Heaven above us, Athole, I will never after to-night look upon your face, or seek your side again. You hear me?"

"Yes," I said quietly, "I hear you!"

"And you have nothing more to say?"

Calmly and steadily I looked up in his face.

"No, Douglas, I have nothing more to say."

"God forgive you, Athole, and—Good-bye!"

CHAPTER VI.

A HAVEN OF REST.

"I seek no copy now of life's first half,
Leave here the pages with long musing curled,
And write me new my future's epigraph,
New angel mine, unhop'd for in the world."

AND this was how we parted—I, and the lover of my youth. If I were writing a work of fiction, I suppose I should have given it a very different ending. Faithlessness never reads pleasantly, and it would have been hard to resist the temptation of making two lovers happy in proper conventional style. But mine is the plain simple story of a plain and simple life, and I cannot weave any brighter threads of romance into it."

The day after I had parted from Douglas, Huel Penryth came to say good-bye to me.

I think he must have guessed something of what had passed between us, but he said very little, only when he rose to take his leave and was holding my hand he looked somewhat wistfully at me.

"You would like to ask me a question I know?" I said. "Do not be afraid, you will not hurt or offend me."

"You are quite sure?" he said eagerly. "It is not for my own sake. Douglas is really in great distress. He was raving like a madman last night. I could hardly believe what he said. Is this parting irrevocable?"

"Yes," I answered simply.

"There is no hope, no chance that the past might be forgotten? You are both very young, and you know how little happiness you seem to have had. Are you acting rightly? Are you sure of your motives?"

"I am quite sure. I cannot explain why I have changed, but I only know that it is a fact. I have made

one mistaken marriage. I will not knowingly make another. It seems as if years divided me from that time when I loved with a girl's unquestioning trust. I could not go back. . . . I could not. If I in time had any thought of—of what he wishes, I should never be content, nor content him. One can't live through such feelings twice in a life-time."

"You are right," he said gravely. "One cannot."

"I wish he would believe," I said earnestly. "But he only thinks me heartless and—and fickle. My life seems to have all gone wrong. I think I have always disappointed and pained anyone who has cared for me."

"I have often wished to tell you," he said gently, "that I am sure your husband understood you far better than you imagined, and at the last——"

"Oh, hush—hush!" I cried. "I cannot bear to think of it. What right had I to be so blind, so selfish? And he will never know that I was so sorry—that I would, oh so gladly, give my own life now to save his, so brave, and good, and useful. That is the sting in it all," I went on, unheeding the tears that were falling helplessly down my cheeks. "I may repent, cry, pray, grieve as I please, but he will never know. Oh, why are we not more careful, more loving, more considerate, living as we do always in the shadow of death—not knowing from day to day what may happen? Oh, if we only were sure of meeting—sure of some time, any time, however distant, bringing us once more together, when we could explain, and understand, and be forgiven. Life is cruel enough, but Death——"

"Perhaps," he said very gently, "Death is less cruel than you imagine. It is for the living I always feel regret. They have to bear the loss, and suffer for the mistakes—to see the sun rise in hopelessness and set in despair. But I do not think you need reproach yourself so bitterly, your husband had not one harsh or bitter thought of you. He blamed himself for selfishly binding your life to his, for taking advantage of your youth and inexperience. He did not easily express his feelings—those quiet, self-contained people never do—but I know they were very deep and earnest."

"I am sure of that," I said sadly. "If only it were not too late. . . . You can have no idea of how

that time haunts me. The wild storm, the cruel sea, and he—facing it alone. I wake at night, hearing the howl of the wind and dash of waves, and his face seems to rise from their midst and look at me so reproachfully.”

I shuddered involuntarily, and covered my eyes with my hands.

“It is no use to speak of this now,” I said at last. “And to Douglas least of all. He knows that I was very unhappy at first—that I married without really caring very much for Donald Campbell. He cannot understand that I should change—that remorse and regret might have opened my eyes to his real worth——”

“No,” said Huel Penryth in the same grave, gentle way. “He cannot understand—yet. But he will. Do not let that thought distress you. I know Douglas Hay—I read his character long ago. He will suffer sharply, cruelly, for a time, but afterwards—there will be consolation. His is not the nature to mourn and endure. The clouds are dark and stormy at first, but the sunshine behind is too strong for them. They are dashed aside, pierced, scattered, and forgotten—so will he forget. If I might speak to you candidly, frankly——”

“You may,” I said, looking steadily up at his face and wondering how so much strength and calmness could be allied to a pity so evident—a gentleness that a woman might have envied.

“Then I will tell you that I have rather dreaded you might make what I felt would be another mistake. You would be less content now with Douglas Hay than—than you esteemed yourself with Donald Campbell. His is not the nature to mate with yours, and his good looks and fascinations, and brilliant qualities, would soon pall upon you. These three years of your life have been an education of your nature and mind, and all that is highest and best in them. You could not endure a new disappointment—a new failure. You would accept love now with fear and questioning, not with simple faith and the halo of idealisation. So it is far, far, better that you reject it altogether than run the risk of a disillusion so cruel that your life would for ever suffer. You would never be wholly dependent on others—your nature will widen and your sympathies enlarge. As time goes on *you will learn to live for deeper and greater and more*

satisfying things than dreams, and passions, and sentiments. I can foresee for you all possibilities of consolation. They lie within yourself, and suffering and loss have taught you the way to find them."

* * * * *

The echo of those words is still ringing in my ears. I have put them down here, but I cannot reproduce the voice that lent them force and inspiration, and yet——

Well, let me be truthful at last. It is to Huel Penryth I owe the secret of this change in myself. From the hour I met him life no longer narrowed itself into petty grooves and beaten tracks. Something in his nature rang out a trumpet call to mine, and all things small, selfish, narrow-minded, fell before that bold and ringing challenge. I am a happier woman for knowing him—I cannot but acknowledge that, and yet even his friendship I may not keep. He, too, fades out of my life, and the veil of silence and separation falls between us from to-night.

Let my tears rain down unchallenged and unseen, save by this safe and silent confidant of so many follies and mistakes. I have time enough now to recall and think them over—time enough to see how wilfully I cheated myself into delusion—time enough to grieve, and repent, and pray.

My soul cries out in passionate longing to the dead I have loved and wronged. To the living one can always atone, but to those dear ones in the silence what can one say? What can they hear or know of the remorse they leave behind?

Answer that, O wise men—preachers of eternal mysteries, expounders of great truths. Answer it in such wise that our breaking hearts may know peace, and feel *sure* that what you say is true and worthy of belief.

I sit here alone in the hush and silence of midnight, and as I lift my head, I see facing me in the mingled light and shadow of the room, another face.

The eyes look back at me, large, and deep, and strangely sorrowful.

With a start I seem to know them as my own.

"We are looking at each other, you and I," they seem to say, "as we have looked so often—in childhood, maidenhood, womanhood, in love, and sorrow, and

despair. But the soul behind shall look out one day with no tears to blind, and no despair to darken. For only through suffering can it win peace, and by time and pain alone is its redemption wrought.

* * * * *

The days come and go. It is nearly two weeks since they laid Grannie in her grave. How long ago it seems—how cruelly, hopelessly long. Some strange spirit of unrest is in me to-day. I cannot remain here. I am weary of the confinement of the house—its loneliness and silence; I will dress and go out, away to the hill-side where she lies at rest—away to that quiet home of the dead I have so often envied, set in the solemn peace of that fairy hill.

The afternoon is cold, but bright. I can easily walk there and back before the dusk falls. I will tell old Jean in case any of the Camerons call here. Bella is expected daily. She might arrive, and they would be sure to come round for me.

* * * * *

How can I write it? How can I say it? Where am I to find words coherent and expressive of joy? It seems almost a wrong to put it down, and yet I must—I must. So much of my life is here. Shall not the silent friend of those past years chronicle also this glad, and amazing, and still almost incredible surprise?

* * * * *

I walked along the winding road that curved itself in gradual ascent to the crest of the hill. I knew where Grannie's grave was, and I passed under the now leafless trees, and among the still and low-lying dead till I reached the spot.

Neither stone nor cross yet marked that resting place—only dark earth, and a few flowers withered and dead from the frosts of those past chill nights. It was very quiet there. No solitary figure was anywhere in sight. No sound save the flutter of some passing bird disturbed the air, and beyond in the western sky was the red wintry sun, beaming over dark hills and faint patches of unmelted snow.

I stood there gazing down, a thousand strange chaotic thoughts whirling through my brain. And always—*always that same wonder.* Did she know? Could she

see me? Was that silence as deep, and that barrier as impassable on her side as on ours, who still lived, and loved, and mourned?

Had she and Donald met, and could she tell him how I sorrowed for his loss. Would he be glad to know I had not forgotten—had not ceased to grieve? Would he—

I think it was at this point my thoughts broke off. A step approaching on the hard, firm road disturbed them. It came nearer, nearer, nearer—so close that out of wonder I turned. . . .

For one moment I thought I must be mad or dreaming. A ghastly terror seized me, and all of earth and sky seemed but one heaving tumult under my quivering limbs.

Could the sea give up its dead, or was this Donald that I saw—pale, worn, wasted—the shadow of the stalwart Highland chieftain I had known, but—looking at me with Donald's honest eyes, holding out Donald's big eager arms in diffident and yet most eager welcome?

"Athole—my lassie—my dear wife!"

Donald's voice. Oh, merciful God, no dream—no fancy this. With a cry—eager, wondering, incredulous, but glad, as surely never word or cry of mine had sounded to his ears before, I flew to those outstretched arms, clinging to him, weeping, laughing, with a gladness almost fearful, so wondering, so incredulous it still knew itself to be!

But it was true, quite true. Donald was alive, well, holding me to his heart, soothing my terrified, hysterical sobbing, murmuring every fond and tender word that love could speak out of its new-found gladness. And in that gladness truth spoke out at last. I told him all—everything—of that lurking shadow which so long had been between us—of my folly, and its bitter lesson—and all my suffering and self-reproach. And I heard in honest broken words, whose rough eloquence was sweet to me beyond all honeyed phrases of romance, how deep and true was his love for me—how long and how patiently he had suffered and kept silence. . . .

* * * * *

I do not hear the story of his escape then—not in any detailed form; that follows long afterwards—but

here by Grannie's grave—here on the Fairies' hill which seems destined to be the stage of so many dramatic episodes in my life, we pour out our hearts in plain and sober truth at last, and hand in hand beside her narrow resting place, we "kiss again with tears."

* * * * *

L'ENVOI.

And now to satisfy enquiries as to how the Laird escaped, and having escaped, how so long a time elapsed before I heard of it.

The boat was caught in the squall and carried out to sea before they could help themselves. Here they found that they were in the teeth of the furious gale, and for hours they battled with deadly peril. Towards dawn the boy Davie, exhausted and spent, was washed overboard. In making an effort to save him, Donald lost steering way of the boat, and a huge wave capsized it. How he struggled still and managed to scramble on the keel and keep himself afloat he could never explain, but nevertheless in the grey dawn he was found in that perilous situation and picked up by a Dutch schooner, in the very last stage of exhaustion. The long exposure and the blow he had received when dashed against the side of the vessel, brought on concussion of the brain, and for months he was never wholly conscious, nor could in any way recollect or explain who he was to the kindly folk who had saved him, and taken him on their own voyage, out of sheer inability to comprehend his language or guess his position.

When at last he drifted back to sense and memory, he was appalled at the length of time that had elapsed since he had been swept out to sea.

He was in a strange country, and he had no money. His only valuables were his watch and chain, and a ring with the seal and crest of his clan. With these he raised enough money to bring him back to England. Then he wrote to me at Corriemoor, telling me of his escape, and that he was on his way home. Following the letter with all speed, he stayed at Inverness to ask news at Craig Bank. Here he nearly scared old Jean out of her wits, and learned that we had all believed him dead, and that I was no longer at Corriemoor. He

left Craig Bank and followed me to the cemetery, resolved that I should not remain an hour in ignorance of his fate.

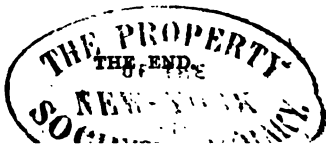
The rest I have explained. And yet, it is not quite easy to explain how deep and strange a thing was this new joy of mine. With what fear and trembling I accepted it, knowing to the full my own unworthiness. How strange it seemed to look up at that kind honest face and read in its pallor and lines of suffering the story of those past months, yet to read behind and above all those signs a radiance and content and deep-felt thankfulness that I had never seen before. How strange to hear murmured again and again as if the words had acquired a new meaning, "My wife, my wife." How strange to see tears in those keen blue eyes that I used to think were cold as the sky of his own land. How more than strange the change in myself that swept away all restraint, and coldness, and diffidence, and for once (oh, thank God for it!) let me show him all my heart and ask for pardon and forbearance, and trust, in that future which at last held brighter and more certain hopes.

* * * * *

And now what need to say more? The few blank pages of my journal still face me, but I have no wish or will to write of what "may be." I am content with what "is."

If tears are in my eyes to-night they are not altogether sad. Only I wish—I wish Grannie was here to rejoice in my joy, and be sure of my exceeding thankfulness.

And so with trembling hand I write these last lines. Surely the mistakes of the past will be my guide for the future—a warning to avoid the pitfalls and the snares that still lie scattered on the path of life—that path on which the feet of womanhood are set now, supported by the warm deep strength of a true and honest love!



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